

The Lady From Oklahoma

ELIZABETH JORDAN



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THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

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THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

A COMEDY
IN FOUR ACTS

BY
ELIZABETH JORDAN



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MCMXI

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TO
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THE CHARACTERS

MISS RUTH HERRICK, Editor of *The Woman's Friend*

"TIM," her office-boy

MISS VIRGINIA JEFFERSON, an authority on English speech

MRS. RUTHERFORD DEAN, a social arbiter

COLONEL ARTHUR BELDEN, U. S. A., Retired. Uncle of
Ruth Herrick

FREDDY BELDEN, son of Colonel Belden

CLARICE MULHOLLAND, a "beauty specialist," with aspirations toward the higher life

BIRDIE SMITH, a hair-dresser, well satisfied with life on this plane

A TEMPERAMENTAL LADY in an Electric Bath

MRS. HERBERT GORDON, interested in politics

MR. JOEL DIXON, millionaire and newly elected Senator from Oklahoma

MRS. JOEL DIXON, his wife, a lady in search of culture

* MISS CARRIE JONES, a manicure with "experiences"

* A SILENT MANICURE

* ANNIE, Mrs. Dixon's maid

TIME:—*The present*

* Characters added since the original production at the Apollo Theatre, Atlantic City, May 15, 1911.

THE SCENES

ACT I

The Office of the Editor of "The Woman's Friend." April

ACT II

*Madam O'Reilly's Beauty Parlors, Fifth Avenue, New York.
Five Days Later*

ACT III

The Same as Act I. June

ACT IV

Mrs. Dixon's Home in New York. October

ACT I

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

ACT I

SCENE:—*The curtain rises on the private office of Miss Ruth Herrick, editor of "The Woman's Friend." Miss Herrick is discovered seated at a large writing-desk, editing manuscripts for the composing-room. She is a handsome woman of thirty, extremely well dressed in tailor-made clothes. She has a quiet force and well-bred self-possession which nothing can disturb. Her desk reveals a mass of manuscripts, proofs, photographs, drawings, and the like. The office is lighted by two windows in the rear, looking out over the roofs and steeples of adjacent buildings. There is a rug on the floor; three chairs (two near the desk), seem a concession rather than an encouragement to visitors. An office-*

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table, covered with magazines and books, stands by the windows. A screen is near it, and the third chair is beside it. A settee is against the wall. There are three doors, one (right) leading into the outer editorial office, another (left) leading to the inner office, the third (up, left) opening on a corridor. Miss Herrick stops reading, glances at her watch, and rings a bell on her desk. Tim enters. He is a very small boy, with red hair, freckles, and an extremely alert expression. He leaves the door open, and the outer editorial office is seen, with figures moving about. The clatter of typewriters in violent action can be distinctly heard.

MISS HERRICK

Tim, I have two appointments this afternoon:
(*She consults a memorandum.*)

One with Miss Clarice Mulholland, at three; the other with Mrs. Herbert Gordon, at quarter past three.

TIM

Yes'm.

MISS HERRICK

If either stays more than ten minutes come and say I'm wanted *immediately*, up in the composing-room.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

TIM

Yes'm.

MISS HERRICK

This is my busy day. I have no time to listen to the sad story of anybody's life. Do you understand?
(She resumes the work of editing manuscripts.)

TIM

Yes 'm; I'll get rid of them mighty quick. Miss Mulholland's waitin' now.

(He starts for the door, then returns.)

Say, Miss Herrick, I dreamed of you last night!

MISS HERRICK

(Absently.)

Did you?

TIM

Yes 'm. I dreamed you an' me was down at Coney Island, shootin' the chutes.

MISS HERRICK

(Smiling over her work.)

Why, Tim, what a beautiful dream! But it must not

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make us forget the stern realities of life. Ask Miss Mulholland to come in.

(Tim leaves the room. Miss Mulholland enters, with a careful imitation of the fashionable walk of the moment. She is a very blond, very "stylish," very self-assured young person of nineteen. She wears an elaborate princess gown, a huge hat, and carries a small hand-bag on which her initials appear in large gold-plate letters. Miss Herrick rises to greet her, and Miss Mulholland bows and sinks into a chair without waiting to be asked. Miss Herrick resumes her seat.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Languidly.)

How do, Miss Herrick. Mebbe you don't remember me. I'm one of Madam O'Reilly's young ladies, up in her beauty parlors. I done your complexion often last winter.

MISS HERRICK

(Without enthusiasm.)

I remember you perfectly, Miss Mulholland.

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MISS MULHOLLAND

(More languidly.)

You ain't been comin' to us lately, have you?

MISS HERRICK

No, I've been going to a little woman who needs all the customers she can get. A few more or less don't count with Madam O'Reilly.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Roused into professional interest.)

We missed you, all right. On'y the other day Madam says to me, "I wonder what's become o' Miss Herrick. She ain't been in for months." I says, "Mebbe she's dead," I says, just like that. An' I wish you could 'a' seen Madam glare at me.

MISS HERRICK

Not dead; only gone—before you people got all my money. I spent most of my salary in Madam O'Reilly's beauty parlors last year. She didn't make me a vision of loveliness, either.

MISS MULHOLLAND

Oh, you ain't so bad! But you *could* make lots more of your looks than you do.

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(She rises, stands off, and studies Miss Herrick, with her head on one side, lost in the artist's interest.)

MISS HERRICK

(Carelessly.)

As an expert, Miss Mulholland, what changes in me would you advise?

MISS MULHOLLAND

Well, for one thing, you look sort of high-browed. You're intelligent, an' you show it! Believe me, nothin' scares men so much.

MISS HERRICK

(Laughing.)

You alarm me!

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Kindly.)

Don't worry about it. Some little curls would make you look more clingin'. Wear jabots, too. There's nothin' like lace at the neck to make a woman seem kind o' tender and helpless. Linen collars is too independent.

(She walks around to Miss Herrick's left and studies her from that point.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

(*Smiling.*)

Thank you, I'll remember that.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(*Growing enthusiasitic.*)

Why, if I had you three months I could make a perfeSSIONal beauty of you.

MISS HERRICK

You flatter me.

MISS MULHOLLAND

No, I don't. 'Tain't your looks. It's my job. I could do it to most any one.

MISS HERRICK

"Get thee behind me!" You can't paint this lily.

MISS MULHOLLAND

Oh, I wouldn't *paint* you! But if I got behind you I'd change your hair mighty quick.

MISS HERRICK

What's wrong with my hair?

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MISS MULHOLLAND

It's *all* wrong. Madam O'Reilly's got a dandy new style this spring—the Sappho Knot. It ain't so stiff as the Psyche Knot, and it's terrible classy. Come up an' try it!

MISS HERRICK

Oh yes, I'll try it sometime. But I'm *very* busy just now—

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Recalled abruptly to the object of her visit.)

Course you're busy. Don't I know? Us professional ladies understands each other.

(She sits down, leans her elbows on Miss Herrick's desk, scattering the papers right and left, and continues, confidentially.)

That's why I come to see you. Listen, Miss Herrick. I'm tired of my job. Bein' a beauty specialist ain't really a job. It's a kind of a new disease!

MISS HERRICK

Why, you've just been discussing it like an inspired genius. I thought you loved your work.

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MISS MULHOLLAND

Loved it! Say, ain't you careless with words? Listen! This is what I do! I steam women's faces, an' I make up their eyebrows, an' I treat their complexions, an' I give 'em electric baths. Could I love that? It's women, women, women from mornin' till night. An' they all want to look better than the Lord ever meant them to.

MISS HERRICK

That sounds interesting.

MISS MULHOLLAND

I had just one interestin' patient last year. She come to me an' she says: "I'm a chromo an' I know it. Make me into a picture."

(Impressively.)

She left it all to me, an' I done it.

MISS HERRICK

Successfully?

MISS MULHOLLAND

Well, I guess! When I got through, her own husband didn't know her. So she divorced him an' married a man with two millions.

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MISS HERRICK

You have proved your case.

MISS MULHOLLAND

But the work's gettin' on my nerves. The doctor says I got an awful delicate organization. An' lemme tell you somethin'.

TIM

(Entering.)

There's a lady here that's wrote her first story, Miss Herrick. She says will you take it, or will she give some other magazine the chanct. Will *I* give her some advice?

MISS HERRICK

You?

TIM

I can do it!

(Earnestly.)

I know what you always say to beginners. I know it by heart!

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Giggling.)

Say, Miss Herrick, that's one on *you*. Ain't he cute?

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(*To Tim.*)

You'll be an editor yourself some day if you don't watch out.

TIM

Not much! I'm goin' to invent air-ships.

MISS HERRICK

Ask the lady to leave her story. We will read it, and write her about it.

(*Exit Tim. Miss Mulholland draws a long breath, and Miss Herrick, realizing that the flood-gates are open, leans back in her chair to listen.*)

MISS MULHOLLAND

I might stand the women. I'm rid of them when the shop closes. But there's the *men*. That's another story!

(*She pauses eloquently.*)

Closin'-up time at the shop is just the beginnin' of the day for them, an' it don't take 'em long to get busy! I give you my word, Miss Herrick, I'm that pursued I'm desprit.

MISS HERRICK

Dear me! Are they all villains? Isn't there an honest village lad among them?

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MISS MULHOLLAND

There ain't no honest village lads nowhere, nowa-days, except in story-books. An' you needn't laugh. I guess you'd be serious enough if it was you they was runnin' after.

MISS HERRICK

I beg your pardon.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Gloomily.)

I don't know what it is about me that catches 'em, but I got somethin' men can't get past. Mebbe it's magnetism. Mr. Freddy Belden says it's reely me soul he admires. I shut his power off quick. He's the dangerous kind, that talks about needin' a good woman's influence.

(She rises and paces the floor.)

MISS HERRICK

Freddy Belden is my cousin.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Turning to look at her.)

Oh, I didn't know. Ain't life the picture-puzzle! Every little while you got to fit in a new piece. Well, no harm done. I ain't told you *all* I think about him.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

Tell me now. His mother was a mother to me, too. She died ten years ago. I'm trying to take her place with Freddy, but I'm afraid I'm not doing it very well.

(Seriously.)

Miss Mulholland, is Freddy up to any mischief?

MISS MULHOLLAND

Not a bit! He's just young an' happy. He'd flirt with a suffrage parade if it passed his way—but he's all right.

MISS HERRICK

I'm glad to hear that.

MISS MULHOLLAND

He's got too much time and money, though. And he comes to Madam O'Reilly's manicure parlors too much. Keep him away.

MISS HERRICK

I will try to.

MISS MULHOLLAND

I'll help you if I can. Thanks to him, an' others like

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him, folks is beginnin' to talk about me. What can I do? It ain't my fault. Freddy Belden himself says my character's a virgin page.

MISS HERRICK

I didn't realize that matters were so serious. But how can *I* help you?

MISS MULHOLLAND

Listen. You c'n help me get some differ'nt work. Every one says you're kind to folks. I want to get out of the beauty business. I want to get into some-thin' higher, where men lets women ab-so-lute-ly alone.

TIM

(*Entering briskly.*)

Lady out there says she's read *The Woman's Friend* for twenty-five years, Miss Herrick, an' she wants to come in an' kiss you.

MISS HERRICK

What?

TIM

'Cause you're the editor. Will I *let* her?

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MISS MULHOLLAND

(Giggling.)

My, you got your troubles, too, ain't you?

MISS HERRICK

Heavens, another! I wish their loyalty to the magazine wouldn't take that form.

(Hopefully, to Tim.)

Couldn't you—

TIM

(Interrupting her.)

Couldn't I? Sure I could!

(Earnestly.)

I'd just as lief.

(He starts with alacrity.)

MISS HERRICK

(Sternly.)

Tim, that is not what I meant! How old are you?

TIM

(Turning back.)

Fourteen.

(Eagerly.)

But I'm growin' awful fast.

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MISS HERRICK

Yes, I'm beginning to think you're growing too fast for this office. Ask the lady to wait.

(Exit Tim.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Gloomily.)

I kin see his finish right now. He's goin' to be like the rest of 'em.

MISS HERRICK

We must try to keep him in the straight and narrow path. But about you. Is there any other work you have a liking for?

MISS MULHOLLAND

I'd like to write stories, if I could get a place to do it reg'lar.

MISS HERRICK

(Feebly.)

Oh!

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Firmly.)

I know I could do it, an' do it *good*. None of us girls at Madam O'Reilly's reads the stories in the

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magazines. They ain't interestin'. If I wrote 'em they would be.

MISS HERRICK

(More feebly.)

Oh, but—

MISS MULHOLLAND

I know what girls wants. I wrote a story to show you. It's a dandy. It's called "Marie, the Magnetic Manicure; or, Her Duty was Her Doom."

MISS HERRICK

It has a stirring title.

MISS MULHOLLAND

Most of what's in it happened to me. Believe me, I could tell you things—

(As she talks she fumbles in the hand-bag and produces a manuscript written on both sides and tied with pink ribbon. She hands it to Miss Herrick, who turns over the pages with raised eyebrows.)

MISS HERRICK

I will read the story, Miss Mulholland, and we will talk about it later. Perhaps you're right in looking

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for other work, but I'm not sure your best field would be literature.

(Thoughtfully.)

Do you think you could fill a position as typewriter ?

MISS MULHOLLAND

Lead me to it. I used to be a typewriter before I was a beauty specialist.

MISS HERRICK

There may be an opening here in a month or two. I will keep you in mind.

(She rises.)

Good-by.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Eagerly.)

Miss Herrick, lemme read some of my story to you. It's terrible sad. I read it to five of the girls last night, an' they cried till the landlady come up-stairs to see what pipe had burst.

(She goes to the desk and recovers her literary treasure.)

MISS HERRICK

Really, Miss Mulholland, I'm afraid I haven't time—

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Unrolling the manuscript.)

Listen.

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(Miss Herrick sits down, with a gesture of resignation.

Miss Mulholland reads:)

“Marie,” cried Harold Vandernecker, “I love you with a love that is my doom. Before yon sun sets in the blood-red eastern sky you shall be my wife!”

MISS HERRICK

Wasn't that rather sudden?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Complacently.)

It wasn't too sudden for Marie. That's what girls wants. Most stories ends with marriage. Mine begins with marriage. That's what makes it so sad.

MISS HERRICK

Why do you have your sun set in the *eastern* sky?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Seizing a pencil.)

That's so. It ain't right. Well, it's new, anyway.

(At this reassuring thought she leaves the sentence unchanged.)

MISS HERRICK

What happened next?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Triumphantly.)

You want to know, don't you? Interestin', ain't it?
Listen.

(She reads:)

Without another word he c-r-ushed her to his
breast.

MISS HERRICK

Harold was impulsive.

MISS MULHOLLAND

Marie liked it. They all do. That's what girls
wants. Now lemme read you what comes afterwards.
They both get mur-r-dered on their weddin' day by
Harold's rival.

TIM

(Entering.)

They want you in the composin'-room, Miss Herrick.
Immediately. The lady that wanted to kiss you has
went away. Mr. Freddy Belden's out there.

MISS HERRICK

Will you excuse me, Miss Mulholland?

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MISS MULHOLLAND

Why, certainly. I'll wait.

(Enthusiastically.)

I've just thought of a grand new end for my story.

I'll put it in right now.

(She goes to the table, sits down near the screen, and enters upon the agonies of composition. Miss Herrick looks after her in despair. During the scene that follows between Freddy and Miss Herrick, Miss Mulholland tears up pages, breaks pencils, thrusts her hands into her hair, and gives other pantomimic evidence of the fine frenzy attending the birth of a great literary idea.)

MISS HERRICK

Show Mr. Belden in, Tim.

(Tim goes out.)

(Freddy Belden enters. He is a blond, immaculate youth of twenty, extremely well dressed. He bustles up to Ruth Herrick, with air of great importance, and as he talks to her he pulls numerous packages of manuscript from all his pockets.)

FREDDY

(Breezily, not seeing Miss Mulholland.)

How d'you do, Ruth! I've been out on the anxious

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bench ten minutes, beating people away from your door. They hated to go. They have stories to read to you, pictures to show to you, and poems to sell to you. But I got rid of them!

MISS HERRICK

Freddy, how can you be so absurd? Why didn't you let them wait?

FREDDY

Why should they wait? I don't like to boast, but I uplifted those people more in that short time than you and *The Woman's Friend* could lift 'em in twenty years. Then I sent them home. What more could they want? Here are their manuscripts. (*He drops them on her desk.*)
Read them at your leisure.

MISS HERRICK

(*Regarding the pile apprehensively.*)
Thank you. Run away now.

FREDDY

Not till I've done my bit. One woman made me her agent. She has submitted this novel for serial publication. She says it weighs two pounds.

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(He balances a large bundle of book manuscript on his hand.)

MISS HERRICK

You made that up!

FREDDY

Not I. She told me the whole plot. The story begins fifty years ago, and works by slow stages up to the present time. The heroine was born—

MISS HERRICK

(Seriously.)

Really, Freddy, you must go. Don't you see I'm engaged?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Emerging from behind the screen, and reading her manuscript as she comes.)

"With a blood-curd-ling yell he hurled the beautiful girl into the black and bot-tom-less a-byss." Say, Miss Herrick, will readers know Marie is dead then? Or must I write that, too?

(She sees Freddy, who, having recognized her with some embarrassment, is stealthily creeping toward

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the door. She drops her manuscript on Miss Herrick's desk and greets him coyly.)

How d'ye do, Mr. Belden?

FREDDY

Why—how do you do?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Coldly.)

My, you don't seem very glad to see me.

(To Miss Herrick.)

An' only Thursday evenin' he asked me out to dinner!

FREDDY

(More embarrassed.)

You wouldn't go, would you?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Darkly.)

No, I wouldn't go. But I rode on top of the Fifth Avenue 'bus with you, an' you said you couldn't tell my hair from the moonlight. Have you forgot that?

(She exchanges a significant look with Miss Herrick.

Both are amused, but their faces sober before Freddy observes them.)

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FREDDY

(Desperately.)

You have so many admirers! Perhaps you're thinking of some one else.

MISS MULHOLLAND

Oh, I am, am I?

(To Miss Herrick.)

Will you listen to him. An' him in the manicure parlors every day for the last two weeks. It's a wonder he's got any nails left.

FREDDY

(Laughing nervously.)

Oh, come now.

(Recovering himself and trying to make the best of it.)

I was getting a rise out of you. You're the fairest flower in the garden of life.

(Sentimentally.)

How can I help looking at you over the fence?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Admiringly.)

Ain't you the limit, Mr. Belden!

(She turns to Miss Herrick.)

There ain't really no harm in him. That's what

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Madam O'Reilly always says. We can't keep Mr. Belden out of the manicure parlors, she says; but he don't count. He's innocent as a kitten.

FREDDY

(*Furiously.*)

A kitten! I like that! Confound Madam O'Reilly.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(*Sweetly.*)

That ain't the way you talk to *her*.

(*To Miss Herrick, with another significant glance.*)

If you could hear the things he says to us girls. Only yesterday he told Birdie Smith he couldn't tell her face from a pink rose.

FREDDY

Say, hold on! Of course I was fooling.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(*Giggling.*)

All right. I'll tell Birdie that. He's afraid of you, ain't he, Miss Herrick? I'm glad there's *some one* he's afraid of. You ought 'a' heard him tell Madam O'Reilly last Monday that the bloom on her cheeks was like the bloom on a purple grape.

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FREDDY

(Throwing himself into a chair and clutching his head in both hands.)

Miss Mulholland, this—is—not—fair.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Unheedingly.)

An' the things he says to me! He told me one day he had to look twice to tell me from a modest violet. An' then he wasn't sure till I talked.

FREDDY

(Bitterly.)

I can tell you from a violet to-day, all right. Do you always repeat all you know?

MISS MULHOLLAND

All I know? Mercy, I ain't got started. Don't you dare me.

(Tim Enters.)

TIM

This lady wants to come right in, Miss Herrick.

(He hands Miss Herrick a card. She drops it on her desk.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Elegantly.)

Then I won't detain you any longer. Besides, Madam expects me back at four. Good-bye, Miss Herrick. Good-bye, Mr. Belden. Pleased to meet you any time.

(Freddy bows coldly. She starts for the door, and suddenly returns.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

I got to have a good salary, Miss Herrick, if I make a change. I'm gettin' twenty a week now, countin' extras. I couldn't come for less.

(Miss Herrick nods and smiles. Miss Mulholland starts again, almost colliding with Tim.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Drawing herself up and regarding him disapprovingly.)

Say, boy, ain't there room for us both on this earth?
(Exit Miss Mulholland.)

MISS HERRICK

That episode should be a lesson to you, Freddy, if anything can be. She meant it so, too. She's rather a good sort, that girl.

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FREDDY

She talks too much.

(Sulkily.)

She'd make a fine phonograph—if one could turn her off sometimes.

MISS HERRICK

She has certainly given us a clear record of your diversions.

(Freddy plunges his hands into his pockets, walks to the window and gazes resentfully before him. Tim, who has been awaiting his chance, thrusts the card before Miss Herrick. She ignores it. He pushes it forward insinuatingly.)

TIM

This lady can't wait a minute. She says 't'ain't business, an' she ain't got no appointment. But it's awful important, she says, an' she's come all the way from Oklahoma to see you.

MISS HERRICK

(Doubtfully.)

I'm afraid she must wait. I'm expecting Mrs.

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Gordon in a few minutes, and she has an appointment.

(She reads the name on the card.)

Mrs. Joel Dixon. Perhaps I can finish with her before Mrs. Gordon comes.

(With sudden decision.)

Show her in.

(Tim goes out, and returns immediately, ushering Mrs. Joel Dixon from the outer office. Mrs. Dixon is a little woman of thirty-eight, with gray eyes, an exquisite, sad face, and garments wholly lacking fit and fashion. She has no figure, no carriage, no manner, but she has unusual magnetism and a subtle charm. Miss Herrick rises to greet her, bows, and motions to a chair. They sit down. Freddy stands as before, sulking and biting his lip. Tim remains also, busying himself with the arrangement of books and magazines on the table.)

MRS. DIXON

Are you Miss Herrick? The editor of *The Woman's Friend*? I got to be sure before I say another word. My business is private.

MISS HERRICK

Yes.

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(To Freddy.)

Freddy, go into the inner office for five minutes.
Later I want a serious talk with you.

FREDDY

Can't it wait till fall? I'm awfully busy now.

MISS HERRICK

Five minutes.

FREDDY

I'll wait. But I don't want to!

(He goes into the inner office.)

MRS. DIXON

(Leaning forward confidentially.)

I'm one of your constant readers. I saw in your magazine how many women write to you, and what good advice you give 'em. So when I had to have advice I says to myself, "She knows everything. She'll help me. I'd ruther go to her than to anybody else."

MISS HERRICK

(With perfunctory courtesy.)

Thank you. I will be glad to help you if I can.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

I just felt you would. I come all the way from Oklahoma to talk to you.

MISS HERRICK

That sounds rather serious!

MRS. DIXON

(Nodding.)

It is serious. It's just this. Miss Herrick, I'm a woman that don't know a thing. I got to know everything, an' I got to know it quick. How will I begin?

(Miss Herrick raises her eyebrows, smiles, and leans back in her chair, studying the speaker.)

MISS HERRICK

(Crisply.)

Tell me a little more. I don't understand. Of course I can't advise you till I do.

MRS. DIXON

It's this way. Me an' my husband was poor. Now we're rich. While we lived in little places we was all right. Nobody minded our mistakes. But everything is different this year.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

In what way?

MRS. DIXON

My husband went into politics a few years ago, and last fall he was elected Senator from Oklahoma. I didn't come East last winter, but I want to go to Washington with him next November, and live there.

MISS HERRICK

I see.

MRS. DIXON

I have to make myself all over before I go to Washington. I ain't got but seven months to do it in. I can't afford to lose a minute. What must I do? I have the money. That's all I have.

(Miss Herrick slowly nods her head and smiles assuringly. When she speaks her voice shows merely a courteous, impersonal interest.)

MISS HERRICK

I understand now. You want to study, and develop, and all that. You mustn't hope to do everything at once. It's not an affair of weeks or months. You can make a good start—

(Mrs. Dixon drops her arms on the desk and thrusts forward a face transfigured by excitement.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

I tell you, I *got* to do it in seven months. That's why I traveled two thousand miles for this talk. Don't I know I could read an' study an' work if I had years? Would I need to bother you if I had? It's got to be done before November. Everything depends on it.

MISS HERRICK

Everything?

MRS. DIXON

(Desperately.)

Yes, everything. My home depends on it, Miss Herrick—my husband depends on it. He's gettin' ashamed of me. I got to keep up with him. I got to be different. *I got to have culture.*

MISS HERRICK

(Slowly.)

You mean—

(Mrs. Dixon nods. She tries to speak and cannot. She fumbles vaguely in her pocket for her handkerchief.)

MISS HERRICK

(Suddenly realizing Tim's presence.)

You may go, Tim.

(Tim goes out.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

My husband thinks I don't know nothin'. An' I don't. That's what makes it hurt. He says I ain't got manners for society—an' that's true, too.

MISS HERRICK

How about *him*?

MRS. DIXON

He's read about women that makes mistakes an' gets laughed at, an' hurts their husbands' careers. He says men get along somehow, but women makes the trouble. He thinks I oughta stay home. But I can't. We ain't got no children, an' I'd die away from Joe.

MISS HERRICK

I think we can help you, Mrs. Dixon, but—

MRS. DIXON

Let me tell you all of it. There's—

MISS HERRICK

Another woman, I suppose.

MRS. DIXON

Yes, in Washington. He met her last winter. She's got education an' culture. At first he wrote about her

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

every week, quotin' her and admirin' her. Now he don't mention her name, but I can see he's thinkin' about her the hull time. You know, when a man stops talkin an' begins to look glum, it's time to set up an' take notice!

MISS HERRICK

Is she young?

MRS. DIXON

Yes, an' good-lookin'. I saw her picture in a newspaper once. Oh, she's got everything I ain't got. An' she's gettin' Joe, if she ain't got him already.
(She takes her handkerchief out of her hand-bag and wipes her eyes.)

TIM

(Entering.)

They want you in the composin'-room, Miss Herrick.
Immediately.

MISS HERRICK

Very well, Tim.

(Exit Tim.)

FREDDY

(Entering.)

The five minutes are up, Ruth. I have an appointment at half-past three.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

One moment, Freddy.

(She turns to Mrs. Dixon.)

Mrs. Dixon, this is my cousin, Frederick Belden—an infant I have brought up at my knee, and across it.

(Mrs. Dixon rises and bows quaintly. Freddy shakes hands with her.)

FREDDY

See those manuscripts, Ruth? I forgot to speak about them.

(He points to the first packages he dropped on her desk. Mrs. Dixon watches him, at first dully and then with real interest in the scene which is new and strange to her.)

MISS HERRICK

Good heavens! What a collection!

FREDDY

Those are the efforts of a maiden lady who wrote you last year, asking your advice about doing literary work. You told her to try. Here's the result.

MISS HERRICK

She never did all that in one year!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

(Running over the manuscripts.)

It's the output of a lifetime blameless but for this.

(He opens them and reads the titles.)

One short story; one description of her first visit to St. Peter's; one essay on the affectionate nature of Elizabeth Barrett Browning; thirteen poems—

MISS HERRICK

(Taking several manuscripts from him and glancing over them.)

This sort of thing would drive me mad if now and then we didn't get something really fine.

(She throws down the manuscripts and takes up the manuscript she has been editing.)

This, for instance. It's from an unknown writer, but it's the best story I've read for months. It goes into the next number. By the way, I must rush it through.

(She jots a few words on the corner of the first page.)

FREDDY

(Reading what she has written.)

"O. K. R. H. Rush." What's the meaning of those mystic symbols?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

It means that this story must be put into type in the shortest possible time.

(She rings for Tim, who enters.)

The foreman of the composing-room will put a dozen men on it, and in a few minutes it will be ready to jam into the next number.

(She gives it to Tim, who crosses to the tube, puts it into a pneumatic cartridge, and shoots it up through the ceiling. Then he leaves the room.)

MRS. DIXON

My! Ain't that remarkable!

MISS HERRICK

(To Freddy.)

How did you get rid of your aspiring author?

FREDDY

Oh, I accepted all her manuscripts. I told her you'd get out a special number of *The Woman's Friend* containing nothing but her work. It's a great scheme. She said she would buy a hundred copies.

(To Mrs. Dixon.)

Watch me.

(He wets a pencil in his mouth, writes in the corner of one of the manuscripts, and starts to shoot it up the tube.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

(Intercepting him and reading what he has written.)

"O. K. Freddy. P. D. Q."

(She laughs and throws the manuscript on her desk.)

FREDDY

(Disconsolately.)

I wanted to rush things, too.

MRS. DIXON

(Admiringly.)

When you shoot it up the tube does it go right into the magazine, just like that? My, I never thought it was so easy to be an editor.

MISS HERRICK

(Smiling.)

No, Mrs. Dixon. First it is set—that is, put into type. Then the galley proof comes down. After that they have to make it into pages—and do a lot of things. Later you will see what happens.

(To Freddy.)

Now, Freddy, run home. We'll have that talk some other time.

FREDDY

I wasn't going to stay, anyway. I'm too busy. Good-bye. Good-bye, Mrs. Dixon.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(He opens the door, goes out, then suddenly thrusts his head in.)

Ruth, do you want to know why I really came here to-day?

MISS HERRICK

(Cheerfully.)

Just love for me!

FREDDY

That was it. And something else.

(Coaxingly.)

Won't you ask father to increase my allowance to five thousand plunks?

MISS HERRICK

I will not.

FREDDY

The cost of living in New York is awful! Think it over.

(Exit Freddy. Miss Herrick returns to her desk.)

MRS. DIXON

He's a nice boy. I wish I had one like him. You get every kind here, don't you? I don't know what

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

head I come under. But I can see pretty plain that you got about all you can handle. There ain't any reason why you should put yourself out for me.

MISS HERRICK

(Absently, glancing over the new manuscripts.)

We're glad to do anything we can for our readers, of course. It's part of our work.

MRS. DIXON

Wait a minute. I want to make things plainer to you. If I went blind as I stood here, you'd see that I got home all right, wouldn't you?

MISS HERRICK

(Laying down the manuscripts.)

I certainly would.

MRS. DIXON

If I dropped dyin' here at your feet, you'd get me to the hospital, wouldn't you? You'd stand by till some one came?

MISS HERRICK

I would, indeed.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Of course you would. You'd think that was a des'pret case. Miss Herrick, I want you to know I'm worse off than that. Death would end things. So would blindness. But I got to live, and see, and suffer. *I'm* des'pret! I'm reachin' out to you in the blackest hours of my life!

MISS HERRICK

(Leaning forward.)

Tell me exactly what you want to do.

MRS. DIXON

I want to get culture. I want to get my husband away from that woman. I want to be fit for the place he's made for us both.

MISS HERRICK

And all in seven months!

MRS. DIXON

I can do it, if *you* help. That ain't just an idea of mine. It's one of the strongest feelin's I ever had in my life. Oh, help me, Miss Herrick! Help me!

MISS HERRICK

(After a pregnant pause.)

I will! Here's my hand on it. I believe you will

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

win out. I'll back you from start to finish. Remember, you cannot get an education in seven months, but you can make a very good beginning.

MRS. DIXON

Oh, bless you!

(She takes the hand in both hers, and holds it to her breast, momentarily overcome. Then, eagerly:)

When will I begin? What will I do first?

MISS HERRICK

Can you stay in New York all the time, from now until November? And work every minute?

MRS. DIXON

I can.

MISS HERRICK

(With swift decision.)

We'll start to-day. I'll turn you over to a corps of dressmakers, beauty specialists, masseurs, and etiquette authorities.

MRS. DIXON

What for?

MISS HERRICK

You must learn to dress well, look well, act well. That's the first part, and the easiest. You must

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

study, too, day and night. I repeat—you won't *know* much at the end of seven months. But you can be so changed in looks and manner that your husband will think you do. Does he know about your ambitions?

MRS. DIXON

No. I'll make myself over first. I've got plenty of money. He give me five thousand dollars when I left home, and said to send for more if I need it.

MISS HERRICK

Does he know where you are?

MRS. DIXON

He thinks I'm travelin'. He's in Washington. He said I could go to Europe if I wanted to.
(*Miss Herrick rings her bell. Tim enters.*)

MISS HERRICK

Tim, bring me the telephone-book.
(*Exit Tim.*)

MISS HERRICK

(*Decidedly.*)
First of all, I will get Mrs. Rutherford Dean to take

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

you in hand. She's a friend of mine, and of my uncle, Colonel Belden. She has an excellent social position, but no money. She will come and live with you, or take you in with her. You must pay well, but it's worth it. She'll make you work. She'll put you through your paces twenty-four hours a day!

MRS. DIXON

I'll work forty-eight hours a day if she wants me to.

MISS HERRICK

For beauty treatment I'll take you up to Madam O'Reilly's and give Miss Clarice Mulholland *carte blanche*. She will like that.

MRS. DIXON

Wouldn't she like cash better?

MISS HERRICK

She will demand both.

MRS. DIXON

I wish there was some way I could pay you.
(*Miss Herrick checks her with a quick gesture.*)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

You can never pay me. That must be understood.

(Smiling.)

Of course I expect you to say a good word for *The Woman's Friend* whenever you can.

MRS. DIXON

I'll take the stump for it! I'll give it as a Christmas present to every woman in Oklahoma!

MISS HERRICK

(Gaily.)

That's the right spirit!

(Tim enters with the telephone-book and a bundle of proofs.)

TIM

Miss Herrick, they need you up-stairs, in the composin'-room.

MISS HERRICK

Oh, Tim!

(She waves him away.)

TIM

They really do. It ain't a bluff this time. *Immediately.* Here's the rough proofs of the story you just

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

sent up. They put a dozen men on it. The form's got to go to the foundry in ten minutes.

(Miss Herrick takes the galley-proofs, glances through them and marks them O. K.)

MISS HERRICK

I'll read the whole thing in the foundry proofs.

(Tim takes the proofs from her and goes out.)

MRS. DIXON

You mean to say the folks up-stairs put a whole story into type that quick? My!

(The door of the outer office opens suddenly and Mrs. Gordon enters.)

MRS. GORDON

Are you ready for me, Miss Herrick?

(Sees the visitor.)

Oh, I beg your pardon. Your boy wasn't there, so I came right in, as I had an appointment.

(She starts to retreat.)

MISS HERRICK

Don't go. We have almost finished.

(To Mrs. Dixon.)

Will you amuse yourself with the magazines for a few moments? Then we'll get those addresses.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

(To Mrs. Dixon.)

Thank you.

(To Miss Herrick.)

I won't need more than five minutes.

(She sits down. Mrs. Dixon retreats to the table, seats herself beside it, and picks up a magazine.)

MRS. GORDON

Miss Herrick, I don't know you as well as I'd like to, but I have a favor to ask. I want to meet Colonel Belden!

MISS HERRICK

My uncle? Surely it's not difficult to meet him! I thought you knew every one.

MRS. GORDON

I don't know him. I want you to bring us together. I want him to come and see me. I need his help in a very important matter.

MISS HERRICK

I see.

(She hesitates.)

Do you mind telling me what the important matter is?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

(Smiling.)

You haven't much confidence in me, have you? However, it's in connection with the new National Park bill. Colonel Belden has enormous influence. He knows all the New York and Washington editors.

MISS HERRICK

(Slowly.)

Senator Kirby is back of that bill, isn't he?

MRS. GORDON

Yes.

MISS HERRICK

I'm going to be quite frank with you. I don't like what I have heard about that new National Park bill. I don't like what I have heard of Senator Kirby.

MRS. GORDON

He has enemies, of course. Who hasn't? But his National Park bill is directly in line with the newest ideals, conservation.

MISS HERRICK

(Grimly.)

I've heard too much of Senator Kirby's methods in

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

the past to believe in them now. Under the new name I should expect to find some form of graft. No, Mrs. Gordon.

(Mrs. Dixon puts down the magazine.)

MISS HERRICK

I'm sorry, but I can't help you to pull Senator Kirby's chestnuts out of the fire. I'm very sure my uncle will not, either. Are you going back to Washington to-night?

MRS. GORDON

(Rising, with a little shrug of affected indifference.)

No, not until next week. I must see Mrs. Rutherford Dean and several others before I go.

(Mrs. Dixon starts, stares, rises, and comes slowly forward. Then she stands transfixed, gazing at Mrs. Gordon with eyes that hold a dawning recognition.)

MRS. GORDON

(Courteously, including Mrs. Dixon in her farewell.)

Good-bye. I hope my interruption has not been too long.

MRS. DIXON

(Hoarsely, advancing toward Mrs. Gordon.)

Are you Mrs. Herbert Gordon, of Washington?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

Yes.

(Distantly.)

But I don't think I have met you before, Mrs. — er —

MRS. DIXON

No, you ain't met me before, Mrs. Gordon, but I've heard of you.

(Slowly.)

I'm Mrs. Joel Dixon, of Oklahoma.

(For an instant Mrs. Gordon looks startled. Then she pulls herself together, smiles, and approaches the other woman.)

MRS. GORDON

Mrs. Dixon? How delightful! Your husband and I are good friends.

(She offers Mrs. Dixon her hand, which Mrs. Dixon ignores. Mrs. Gordon turns to Miss Herrick.)

Good-bye, Miss Herrick. Good-bye, Mrs. Dixon.

So glad to have met you. If I were to be in New York longer I would ask if I might come and see you.

As it is, we must wait till you come to Washington.

(She bows to them both, and leaves. Mrs. Dixon turns and stares at Miss Herrick. She tries to speak, and cannot. She makes a vague gesture toward the door.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(Finding her voice at last.)

That's her. That's the woman I told you about!

MISS HERRICK

Mrs. Gordon! How incredible that seems. Who could have dreamed you two would meet here?

MRS. DIXON

That's *her*.

MISS HERRICK

I'm sorry it's Mrs. Gordon. She's a well-known lobbyist. She's almost, if not quite, an adventurer. She is said to be utterly unscrupulous. And she uses everybody that comes her way.

MRS. DIXON

Did you notice her looks? Did you take her all in, with her clothes and her talk and her manners and her soft voice?

(Mimics the other woman.)

Your husband and I are good friends! That's her!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(She stands rigid for a moment, staring into space.

Then, with an uncontrolled gesture, she throws up her arms, and looks wildly about her.)

My God! what chance have I got to get my husband away from a woman like that?

(She breaks down, sinks into her chair, and buries her face in her hands.)

She's beat me already. I was beat before I come. But I didn't know it.

(For a second Miss Herrick looks at her thoughtfully. Then she goes and stands beside her.)

MISS HERRICK

(Incisively.)

You Western people often use the word "quitter." What does it mean?

MRS. DIXON

(Turning quickly.)

Quitter! It don't fit me.

MISS HERRICK

(Quietly.)

Doesn't it? I'm glad. I began to think it did.

MRS. DIXON

Well, have I got any chance against her? Have I?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

Not if you are going to give up the game at the first bunker.

MRS. DIXON

(Tearfully.)

I dunno what a bunker is. But if it's something nasty she's it!

MISS HERRICK

(With calculated directness.)

What are you going to do? Make a fight for your husband? You may have a bigger fight before you than you expected. Did you hear her speak of that new National Park bill?

MRS. DIXON

(Without interest.)

Yes.

(She sees Miss Herrick's expression and adds:)

What about it?

MISS HERRICK

(Thoughtfully.)

I wonder if Senator Dixon realizes what sort Kirby and Mrs. Gordon are! Perhaps they're using him. I'm beginning to think—

(She looks quizzically at Mrs. Dixon.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Yes, I think you're going to have a busy summer.
Have you braced up? Are you ready for it?

MRS. DIXON

(Rising quickly.)

Yes. Let's start!

(Miss Herrick returns to her desk and corrects her proofs, talking eagerly.)

MISS HERRICK

As soon as I've finished this work we'll take a taxicab and make the rounds. By to-morrow morning you will be in the hands of Miss Mulholland, Mrs. Dean, and Miss Jefferson.

MRS. DIXON

That sounds all right.

MISS HERRICK

Mrs. Dean will give you general information and polish.

MRS. DIXON

Good!

MISS HERRICK

Miss Mulholland will make you into what she calls
"a perfections beauty."

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

I'm little, but I've got room for all the beauty she can put on me.

MISS HERRICK

Miss Jefferson will teach you grammar and "place" your speaking voice.

MRS. DIXON

Mercy! Where will she place it?

MISS HERRICK

(Laughing.)

Where it belongs—at a safe distance from your nose! But I wish we had more than seven months for work. This will be a race against time!

MRS. DIXON

(Enthusiastically.)

That's what it is—a race against time. But I've done the first thing I started out to do—I've got *you* to run the automobile! And I know something about motors myself. I've cranked the car, shifted the gears, and pulled out the clutch. Jump in beside me and *let her out*? We won't touch nothing but the high places!

CURTAIN

ACT II

ACT II

"The great act without an actor."

TIME:—*Five days later.*

SCENE:—*Madam O'Reilly's beauty parlors on Fifth Avenue. The scene shows three private booths, side by side (open compartments, with partitions between, but no doors), facing the audience. Curtains, on poles, are pushed to the side of the left and center booths, leaving the opening clear. Exits, right and left, lead to other departments of the "parlors." In the right compartment sits a woman in an electric bath (curtains drawn apart at cue). When she is revealed her head alone shows. On the other side hang huge switches and collections of curls, puffs, and beauty apparatus in glass cases. The center compartment is occupied by Mrs. Dixon, who is engaged in having her nails manicured, her fingers massaged and "tapered," and her complexion treated by Miss Mulholland, while Miss "Birdie" Smith, a typical hair-dresser, is constructing an elaborate coiffure on her head. Miss*

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Smith's task, which begins with the curling of the hair, occupies almost the full time of the act. She dresses the hair carefully and thoroughly, and completes the artistic structure on her "patient's" head just before the final scene. There is no "faking" in this act. Every detail of the beauty treatment is followed exactly as it is done in New York's most successful "beauty parlors."

At the rear of the center compartment is a swinging door, u. c. exit.

Mrs. Dixon is covered from head to foot with a white linen garment, fastened with strings at the back of her neck. Her face is covered with "skin food." Her hair is hanging over her shoulders. She is unrecognizable until she speaks. Seated at the left column of the center booth is Miss Virginia Jefferson, a charming girl, whose task is to instruct the lady in the elemental rules of English grammar and the "placing" of the speaking voice. She is having a shampoo and hair treatment. A hair "dryer" is in operation, blowing out her hair. Miss Mulholland is holding Mrs. Dixon's hand and working on her nails. A small manicure-table stands between her and Mrs. Dixon. On it are manicure instruments, rouge, finger-bowl, perfume, etc. A trim little maid in cap and apron waits on the

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

elegant assistants, handing them curling-irons, changing finger-bowls for the manicures, and otherwise making herself useful. In the booth, extreme left, sits Mrs. Dean having her nails manicured by Carrie Jones. The curtain rises very slowly on this busy scene. For half a minute no one speaks, though there is action all along the line.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Encouragingly, to Mrs. Dixon.)

You got nice nails, natu'ally, Mrs. Dixon. Have them done every day for a few weeks, an' wear gloves every night. Then your hands will look fine.

MRS. DIXON

All right.

MISS MULHOLLAND

But keep the gloves *on*. Don't take them off at two o'clock in the mornin' an' throw them at the wall, like most ladies does.

MRS. DIXON

They're ruinin' all the linen sheets and pillow-cases on my bed.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

What d' you care about the sheets. You live in a hotel, don't you? They ain't *your* sheets! Let the manager get peevish!

(She looks up and sees the hair-dresser tentatively trying the effect of a classic knot on Mrs. Dixon's head.)

My, Birdie, that's goin' to be swell!

MISS SMITH

All she'll have on is one switch, an' a transformation, an' three puffs, an' a couple of curls.

MRS. DIXON

Mercy! Ain't that enough for one woman to carry around?

MISS JEFFERSON

Pardon me, Mrs. Dixon. Please say *isn't*, not *ain't*. And don't speak *quite* so loudly.

MRS. DIXON

I will. I won't.

MRS. DEAN

(To Carrie Jones.)

Don't cut the cuticle, please, Miss Jones.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

CARRIE JONES

(To Mrs. Dean, as she busily cuts the cuticle.)
An' he says to me—

MISS SMITH

You're lucky to have *some* hair of your own, Mrs. Dixon. Lots of ladies goes out o' here round-shouldered, they got so much false hair on.

(Miss Herrick enters, accompanied by a manicure. She wears the little curls and lace jabot recommended by Miss Mulholland.)

MISS HERRICK

Good-morning, everybody!

MISS MULHOLLAND

How do, Miss Herrick? Ain't Mrs. Dixon goin' to look fine? If she'd leave us make her a Titian blonde you'd never know her.

(Approvingly, noticing the change in Miss Herrick's appearance.)

Say, you look all right, too. Ain't your gentlemen friends more spontaneous now?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Good-mornin', Miss Herrick. I'm makin' them do everything at once, 'cause time is so precious. I bring Miss Jefferson here, too, to correct my grammar. Will anything be left of me when they all get through?

(Miss Smith resumes the waving of Mrs. Dixon's hair. Smoke arises from each wave, with a strong hint of burning hair.)

MISS HERRICK

You seem to be leading the strenuous life. I'm sure that coiffure will be charming, Mrs. Dixon.

(To the manicure.)

I will have my nails done right here, please.

(They seat themselves at the right column of the center booth, and the manicure begins work on Miss Herrick's hands.)

MISS SMITH

I'm doin' my best for her, Miss Herrick. I stand off an' look at my subjeck like she was a picture. I say to myself, "Now, here's this lady. She's got a little head without much shape to it. She ain't got no height, nor dignity, nor looks to speak of, nor style. She's got to be made *artistic*," I say. Art is the note for her. Then I go to work.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(*Aggrieved.*)

My goodness! Ain't she frank?

MISS JEFFERSON

Pardon. Isn't she frank.

MRS. DIXON

Yes, she *is*.

MISS JEFFERSON

I mean you must say *isn't*, not ain't, Mrs. Dixon.

MRS. DIXON

Oh!

MISS SMITH

There ain't nothin'—

(*She glances at Miss Jefferson.*)

There *isn't* nothing I know of more interesting than to work here an' make people look the way they never thought they could. Believe me, I'd ruther do it than paint pictures.

MISS MULHOLLAND

Take it from me, it don't do 'em no good. Mr. Freddy Belden says to me only the other mornin', "Miss

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Smith's an artist," he says. "Congress ought to give her a medal," he says, "for pilin' so much on the tops of women's heads that they dassent work the inside of them none," he says; "an' thus they become man's unresistin' prey."

(Gloomily.)

That sounded awful, Birdie—just like you was startin' women on the downward path.

MISS SMITH

Many a woman's been kept off the toboggan by a nice healthy interest in a new style of hair. Only the other day a lady came in here an' said she wanted to die. "I ain't got nuthin' to live for," she says. "Oh yes, you have," I says. "You ain't tried the new Sappho Knot." I wish you could 'a' seen her face light up!

MISS HERRICK

Did she try it?

MISS SMITH

Did she? I guess. When I got it all fixed she looked fine. "Is it death now?" I says. "No," she says, an' her air was glad an' gay. "I'm goin' to wear this to the theater to-night," she says, "an' sit

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

exactly in front of my rival. Then perhaps she'll die instead."

(*Miss Mulholland sniffs. Mrs. Dixon, who has been regarding herself at different angles in a hand-mirror, breaks restively into the conversation.*)

MRS. DIXON

I s'pose that was a joke. It 'most always is a joke, when it sounds so terrible true.

MISS JEFFERSON

Pardon. *Terribly* true.

MRS. DIXON

Yes, 'tis.

MISS JEFFERSON

I mean you must *say* terribly true, not *terrible* true.

MRS. DIXON

Oh! *Terribly, terribly, terribly* true!

(*Mrs. Dixon sighs heavily. Miss Mulholland finishes the nails, wipes the skin food from Mrs. Dixon's face, and massages it carefully. Then she fills a bowl with boiling water, and dips a cloth into it. She next proceeds to "steam" her complexion by wringing out the hot cloth and laying it over her face. Mrs. Dixon gasps.*)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

(To Carrie Jones.)

I don't like the nails quite so pointed, Miss Jones.

CARRIE JONES

(To Mrs. Dean, ignoring this expression of preference.)

An' I drew myself up an' I give him one look, just like that—

(She glares at Mrs. Dean.)

MISS HERRICK

(To Miss Smith.)

You must have some interesting experiences here.

MISS SMITH AND MISS MULHOLLAND

(In unison.)

Interestin' experiences!

(They drop their work, open their lips to speak, lean forward expressively, then, remembering something, exchange glances, and stop.)

MISS SMITH

(Pursing her lips primly.)

The manager don't permit us to discuss 'em.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Thoughtfully, standing back to study her "patient.")
Miss Herrick, do you think we ought to "skin" her?

MISS HERRICK

(Hastily.)

Good heavens, no! I don't think her complexion needs such heroic treatment!

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Reluctantly—touching parts of Mrs. Dixon's face with her forefinger.)

Well, mebbe it don't. Mebbe them little brown spots is only liver. We'll try the steam *first*, anyway.

(She gets the steaming cloth and smooths it tightly over Mrs. Dixon's features.)

MISS SMITH

(Irritably.)

Say, Clarice, do me a favor. Remember that *I'm* doin' somethin' to this patient, too.

MISS MULHOLLAND

All right, Birdie.

(Soothingly.)

Keep your Psyche Knot on.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(To Miss Jefferson, aside.)

My, how sensitive we are when we got the artistic temper'ment!

(She removes the cloth, showing Mrs. Dixon's face, parboiled in appearance. Mrs. Dixon groans. Miss Mulholland continues the steaming, doing it six or eight times, stepping aside at intervals to give place to Miss Smith, who is still waving Mrs. Dixon's hair with her hot irons.)

MRS. DEAN

You're touching the quick, Miss Jones. That hurts!

CARRIE JONES

(To Mrs. Dean.)

An' I says to him, I says, "S-i-r-r-r—"

MISS SMITH

(Dreamily.)

Waves does take time. I know the man that invented the permanent natural wave in women's hair. He puts something sticky on it. He charges fifty dollars for doin' it.

MISS JEFFERSON

Doesn't it spoil the hair?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS SMITH

(*Thoughtfully.*)

Well, sometimes, of course, when it burns up. But he don't charge nothin' when that happens.

MISS MULHOLLAND

I know a man that blows up the skin in women's faces, and then fills the hollows with *par-a-feen*. He done it to a friend of mine. Her own mother didn't know her that night when she went home.

MRS. DIXON

(*Eagerly.*)

Was she improved?

MISS MULHOLLAND

I dunno. Her young man give her one look when he seen her, and then he went out an' sent her a pillow with "Rest in Peace" on it.

MISS HERRICK

(*Laughing.*)

Did she?

MISS MULHOLLAND

Yes, in peace from him. He never come no more. An' her face looked so terrible she couldn't go out for weeks. So I guess she *had* to rest.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(*Soothingly, to Mrs. Dixon.*)

Now I'll massage your face with cold cream. Then you'll feel better.

MRS. DIXON

(*Gloomily.*)

I couldn't feel no worse.

MISS JEFFERSON

Pardon. *Any* worse.

MRS. DIXON

Any worse.

(*Thoughtfully.*)

I couldn't feel *any* worse. It don't sound as strong as *no* worse. When I feel this bad I want to *say* so!

(*To Miss Smith.*)

Ain't my hair burnin'?

MISS SMITH

(*Cheerfully.*)

Oh no; that's on'y the oil!

MISS JEFFERSON

Isn't my hair burning? Don't say "*ain't*."

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Ain't—*isn't*—ain't—*isn't*.

(*Miss Mulholland seizes a jar of cold-cream, takes large quantities of it, and puts it on Mrs. Dixon's face, rubbing it carefully into the pores.*)

MRS. DIXON

Oh, ain't this awful!

MISS JEFFERSON

Pardon. *Isn't* this awful.

MRS. DIXON

(*With conviction.*)

Yes, 'tis. No, it *isn't*.

(*A puff of smoke rises.*)

Yes, 'tis!

(*To Miss Mulholland.*)

Ugh! I've swallowed some of that cream!

MISS MULHOLLAND

(*Coldly.*)

Well, don't. That jar's most gone.

MRS. DEAN

(*To Carrie Jones, in hopeless accents.*)

Now, you have cut my finger!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

CARRIE JONES

(To Mrs. Dean, ignoring this painful incident.)

I says to him, "'Tis true I'm a workin' girl," I says—

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Indicating Carrie by a nod in her direction.)

If the things she thinks happened to her really *did* happen some publisher would put a binding on her!

MISS SMITH

An' then she'd be suppressed!

MRS. DIXON

(Reviving when Miss Mulholland interrupts her efforts for a moment.)

I wish you'd tell me somethin', Miss Herrick. I went to the Ritz the other afternoon for tea. Mrs. Dean took me, and I seen—

MISS JEFFERSON

(Correctingly.)

Pardon. *Saw!* Speak a little more softly, Mrs. Dixon, please.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(In a sibilant whisper.)

I saw lots of women put their elbows on the tables.
Why was they doin' that?

MISS JEFFERSON

Were they.

MRS. DIXON

Were they. Mrs. Dean won't let me do it, and I
ain't—

MISS JEFFERSON

Haven't.

MRS. DIXON

Haven't had 'em on since I come. But if it was
wrong, like she says—

MISS JEFFERSON

As she said.

MRS. DIXON

(Emphatically.)

As she said.

(To Miss Herrick, aside.)

She has to correct me like this every blessed minute,
'cause we ain't got any time to lose. I get pretty

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

sick of it, but it's got to be done. Now, if it was wrong, why was they—

MISS JEFFERSON

Were, *were*.

MRS. DIXON

Were, *were* they doin' it?

MISS HERRICK

Possibly they didn't know any better.

MRS. DIXON

Oh yes, they did! They was society women.

MISS JEFFERSON

(*Firmly.*)

Were society women. Lower your voice a trifle, please, Mrs. Dixon.

MRS. DIXON

She'll have my voice in my shoes before she gets through.

(*She extends her feet.*)

There ain't room there for it, either. Three sizes smaller than I'm used to!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Darkly surveying the cloth with which she has wiped the cream off Mrs. Dixon's face.)

Ladies that *thinks* they got clean faces ought to look at the cloth after rubbing off this cream. What soap d' ye use?

MRS. DEAN

Miss Jones, that finger is still bleeding!

CARRIE JONES

(To Mrs. Dean.)

"Young lady," he says, and *tears* was in his voice—

THE LADY IN THE ELECTRIC BATH

(Shrilly [back of the curtain, right].)

Miss Mulholland! I think I'm going to die!

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Pushing back the curtain on the right arch and going to her.)

Oh no, you ain't. If they went that easy lots more women would be dead.

THE LADY IN THE ELECTRIC BATH

I feel *so* nervous! You know I'm here *partly* for my nerves.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

Well, you won't have no nerves after you get through.
Any nerves!

(She nods toward Miss Jefferson.)

She'll have us all perfect before *she* gets through!

(She turns a screw or two, gives the patient a drink of water, and comes back to Mrs. Dixon.)

MISS JEFFERSON

You were speaking of manners, Mrs. Dixon. When I was graduated at the convent I had the most charming manners of any girl in my set, but I had to drop them the first year. They embarrassed people too much.

MRS. DIXON

(Dazed.)

Why did they?

MISS JEFFERSON

Nobody else had any. But they thought they had to live up to me, and it was a frightful strain. So I came down to them, and we were all more comfortable. Now, if you will excuse me, I will have my facial massage.

(To Miss Herrick.)

Will you correct her grammar while I'm gone?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

She will *not*. I'm goin' to have a rest.

(She looks after Miss Jefferson as that young lady goes out.)

Oh, my—*ain't* this a relief! I'd make every blessed mistake there is now if I could think of 'em all!

MISS MULHOLLAND

Next we'll put on the ice-pack. That's real exhilaratin', an' it closes all the pores.

(She takes a bowl of cracked ice, makes a poultice of the ice on a cloth, and applies it to Mrs. Dixon's face.)

MRS. DIXON

(With chattering teeth.)

Ow-w-w! Wow! That's freezin' me!

MISS HERRICK

(With an obvious desire to divert her mind.)

What is Mrs. Dean doing with you now? What is your daily routine?

MRS. DIXON

She has me read a leadin' New York newspaper every morning so I'll be well informed an' intelligent.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

Capital! That's the way to begin.

MRS. DIXON

I read the newspaper in bed, while I'm havin' breakfast. Mrs. Dean comes at ten o'clock 'an' we talk over the news. I tell her all my thoughts, and she tells me whether they mean anything.

MISS HERRICK

Do they?

MRS. DIXON

No! Then I come here every day to get these things done. After that it's dinner-time—I mean luncheon.
(*To Miss Smith.*)

You got your hull weight on one hair in my head!

MISS SMITH

Excuse me. I'm most finished.

MRS. DIXON

(*Wearily.*)

So am I!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

THE LADY IN THE ELECTRIC BATH

(Earnestly.)

Miss Mul-hol-land! I know one foot's paralyzed. I can't feel a thing!

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Going to her.)

What you complainin' of, then? Some ladies feels awful in there. Control yourself. D'you know any po'try? Sometimes that helps, if you say it to yourself.

(She turns some more screws, pats the patient on the head, and returns to Mrs. Dixon.)

MISS HERRICK

What do you do after luncheon?

MRS. DIXON

I take a nap to gain flesh. Mrs. Harwood says I got to gain ten pounds to make my figger right. Then we go for a drive in the Park an' look at the other women.

MISS HERRICK

That must be pleasant.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

It's too discouraging. The other women know so much. An' they show everything they know.

MISS HERRICK

Yes, it's all in the show-case, and the sign is up.

MRS. DIXON

I ain't even got the show-case yet. But I'm havin' the sign painted—that's one sure thing.

MISS HERRICK

Miss Mulholland's doing that.

MRS. DIXON

Of course Miss Jefferson is with me the hull time. An' whenever I open my mouth she just about jumps into it, correctin' my mistakes, an' raisin' and lowerin' my voice like it was an elevator.

MISS HERRICK

(Sympathetically.)

That's *very* important, you know.

MRS. DIXON

I *guess* I know it. You don't think I'd stand it a

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

minute if't wa'n't important. But I do stand it! I
got to have culture!

MISS HERRICK

You must be patient.

MRS. DIXON

(Yearningly.)

I wish I could learn how to look bored. That's awful important, too. You see, if you can look at other women like they was dust under your feet that makes them feel like dust. Then you're on top! But I can't look bored to save my life. New York's one long movin'-picture show to me!

MISS HERRICK

You're lucky not to have to reduce your weight. I lived on buttermilk for six weeks last winter trying to lose ten pounds.

(At the words everybody stops work on the instant and shows intense interest. Even the Lady in the electric bath forgets her sufferings and inclines her head to listen. Mrs. Dean cranes her head around the side of her booth. Everybody forgets Mrs. Dixon. Carrie Jones alone remains wholly oblivious of interests other than her own.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS SMITH

(Excitedly, approaching Miss Herrick.)

I tried that, too, but it didn't do any good. I gained eight pounds. Now I'm livin' on six crackers a day.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Joining them, and speaking with unusual animation.)

That's the way to do it. There's only one good rule. Don't eat any food with your meals. I ain't had enough to eat since last spring. I'm takin' the lemon cure now: one lemon the first day, two lemons the second day, three lemons the third day, four lemons the fourth—

MISS SMITH

And ten lemons the tenth day. I tried it. It don't work. The best plan is: don't let yourself be comfort'ble for one minute. If you're sleepy, wake up. If you're sittin' down, get up. If you're dead tired, go and walk five miles. I know a girl that lost twenty pounds that way.

(Thoughtfully.)

She's in a sanitarium now. She thinks she's Theodore Roosevelt!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

THE LADY IN THE ELECTRIC BATH

I've got ten yards of rubber wrapped around me this minute under my sheet.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Hastily.)

Here, don't wriggle out of it.

MRS. DIXON

Mrs. Dean says the best way to reduce your hips is to get down on the floor and *roll*—fifty times every mornin' and fifty times every night. But where's a fat woman goin' to roll in a flat? Don't let's talk about gettin' thin. When women start on that subject every other interest in life goes back an' sets down.

(She waves it away. The girls laugh and resume their work.)

THE LADY IN THE ELECTRIC BATH

(Firmly.)

"A soldier of the Legion lay dying in Algiers—"

MRS. DIXON

What's she doin'? Is her mind goin'?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

Never mind her. She's takin' her *first*. Now I'm goin' to use a nice mild astringent on your face.

MRS. DIXON

Mercy! what's that?

(*Warningly.*)

Don't you take the skin off!

MISS MULHOLLAND

It's for the pores. The ice closes the pores, an' the astringent keeps 'em closed.

(*Gazing earnestly.*)

My, I can just see them pores shut up!

(*She applies the astringent delicately with a cloth and a light touch.*)

THE LADY IN THE ELECTRIC BATH

(*Gazing into space.*)

"There was lack of woman's nursing, there was dearth of woman's tears."

MRS. DIXON

That woman makes me nervous. You don't think she is dying, do you?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

THE LADY IN THE ELECTRIC BATH

I'll stand this till I count fifty. One, two, three, four, five, six—

(She goes on counting inaudibly, with expressive facial pantomime.)

MISS HERRICK

She's all right. What do you do when you get back from the Park?

MRS. DIXON

I read till five o'clock with Mrs. Dean. She gives me my lesson then, on the elements.

MISS HERRICK

The elements? What elements?

MRS. DIXON

The elements of knowledge, Mrs. Dean calls 'em. Who are our best authors? What have they written? Bridge. Our fav'rite composers. Wagner. The modern drama, an' does it mean anything?
(Drearily.)

She says a woman that don't know the elements might as well be dead.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

I'm afraid she's right.

MRS. DIXON

(Brightening.)

I'm learning them. We talk about them all through supper—dinner, I mean—when she ain't tellin' me which fork to use, an' how to keep my shoulders up, an' not to forget my napkin, an' to eat slow, like I wasn't hungry.

(To Miss Smith, jumping.)

Ouch! That hot iron's layin' right on my scalp.

MISS SMITH

Excuse me.

(Expansively.)

I got one patient that don't never feel burns—but the doctors thinks there's somethin' the matter with her.

THE LADY IN THE ELECTRIC BATH

Forty-nine, fifty!

(Miss Mulholland goes to her.)

Now, I'll stand it till I've repeated a poem.

"The boy stood on the burning deck, whence all but him had fled."

Miss Mul-hol-land! It's like pins and needles now!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

All right. If you can't stand it any longer I'll let you out.

(She opens the case and releases the victim, who is robed in a sheet.)

THE LADY

(Coming forward and lifting first one foot, then the other.)

Oh, oh! Are my feet still there?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Patting her back.)

Yes, you've got them yet. Come on. You can't dance here!

THE LADY

I feel so strange!

MISS MULHOLLAND

You'll feel queer for a week or two; but don't mind that. As soon as you get over it come again.

(Exit both.)

MISS HERRICK

Thank heaven she's gone. She was getting on *my* nerves.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(*To Mrs. Dixon.*)

Of course Mrs. Dean lets you rest in the evening?

MRS. DIXON

Not much! We go to see a play or hear a concert or something to develop my mind. I would enjoy that if she'd leave me alone to listen to the music an' think of home. But she don't. It's "Strauss wrote" this, an' "Wagner wrote" that, an' "pronounce Debussy again," till I'm just about sick.

MISS HERRICK

I believe you're ready to give it all up.

MRS. DIXON

No, I ain't. I want to have the satisfaction of speakin' right out once, without gettin' stopped and corrected. Thank heaven Virginia Jefferson's off the job for a minute.

(*Looking around apprehensively.*)

She ain't coming back yet, is she?

MISS HERRICK

No, let yourself go!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

I want to say I'm so sick of that parcel of women up to my rooms that I have horrid dreams about 'em at night. Mercy! I hope they ain't heard me! Mrs. Dean's around here somewhere.

(She stops short, then continues, reassured.)

I feel better since I've said it. But I ain't goin' to give up, now nor never.

MISS HERRICK

That's right. Never say die.

(To the manicure.)

Have you finished?

(The manicure nods, gathers up her materials, and they rise.)

MISS HERRICK

(To Mrs. Dixon.)

I'm going to try the new Sappho knot. I hope no one will send me a floral pillow after one look at it.

(She and the manicure go out together.)

CARRIE JONES

(Confidentially, to Mrs. Dean.)

An' I wish you could of seen him c-r-r-awl away.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

It's very interesting, Miss Jones. But aren't you forgetting about my nails?

(Enter Miss Mulholland, who catches the last remark and stops. Birdie Smith is finishing her work on Mrs. Dixon's hair.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

How d'ye do, Mrs. Dean!

MRS. DEAN

Good-morning, Miss Mulholland.

(Miss Mulholland takes Mrs. Dean's hand, looks at her nails with critical attention, and frowns meaningly at Carrie Jones.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

(To Carrie.)

Guess you'll have to do those nails again, Carrie. I'll give you an encore on them.

(To Mrs. Dean, as she leans against the column at her left and watches the work.)

Carrie makes me think of a man she and I knew once. Remember Willie Hicks, Carrie? He sold perfumery. He used to give a bottle to every girl he knew. The way they crowded round! You couldn't tell Willie from a bargain counter.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

CARRIE JONES

(Trying to take an unpleasant incident in a philosophic way.)

Yes, girls liked Willie, didn't they?

MISS MULHOLLAND

They liked the perfumery, but Willie thought it was him they liked. And no wonder! A bottle of perfumery with every introduction to Willie! Why, girls in Yonkers and Pleasantville sent Willie Hicks notes.

CARRIE JONES

(Suspiciously.)

Say, Clarice, when does the point come in?

MISS MULHOLLAND

Finally Willie didn't have time to work. It was just parties and picnics and trolley rides with him. "Clarice," he says, "I can't stand this much longer. I'm the popular idol. I'm going the pace that kills. It's too much for any man. I must have a rest," he says. Then he got it. He lost his job.

CARRIE JONES

(Haughtily.)

Miss Mulholland, is there anything personal in your remarks?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

Nothin' at all, Carrie. All the girls faded away, and you couldn't find Willie with a microscope. "Clarice," he says, "I could stand this terrible lonesomeness if it wasn't for the perfumery. Every little while I pass a girl that's got some on," he says, "an' memories come thick an' fast. Oh! but this world is fickle," he says. "What does it care now for Hobson an' Dewey an' Roosevelt an' me? Why," he says, "even Carrie Jones might lose her job and be forgot some day!"

(Mrs. Dean laughs. Miss Jones tosses her head.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Returning to Mrs. Dixon's side.)

Now I'll do your eyebrows.

(She resumes work. Mrs. Gordon enters, glances into the first booth, recognizes Mrs. Dean and greets her joyfully.)

MRS. GORDON

Isabel Dean! What luck to find you here!

MRS. DEAN

(Offering her disengaged hand, but not rising and not overjoyed.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Why, Helen! I haven't seen you for ages. Three years, isn't it?

MRS. GORDON

(Drawing off her gloves.)

All of that. Can I get another manicure?

CARRIE JONES

I'm afraid not. I guess every one's gone to lunch.

MRS. DEAN

You can have Miss Jones in five minutes. She serves a slice of the Tenderloin with every manicure treatment!

CARRIE JONES

(Stiffly.)

Sorry, but my lunch-time is exactly half-past twelve. I'll try to get you another young lady when I finish Mrs. Dean's nails.

MRS. GORDON

(To Carrie Jones.)

Thank you. I won't insist on the slice.

(To Mrs. Dean.)

What are you doing now?

(She sits down to wait.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

Something very interesting. I'm making over a crude little Western woman into a vision of beauty and grace. We come here every day, and I coach her between times.

MRS. GORDON

(Languidly.)

Why don't these little Western women stay in the West, where there's more room?

MRS. DEAN

Are they crowding you?

MRS. GORDON

One of them is trying to!

MRS. DEAN

If she is like my little woman she'll have you in a corner in no time, with your back to the wall. I've never met such quickness and cleverness.

BIRDIE SMITH

(To Mrs. Dixon.)

This coy-fur makes you look like a society woman with a dash of the high-brow.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

Now I'll show you how to put these plasters on.
You must wear 'em nights.

MRS. DEAN

(To Mrs. Gordon.)

I suppose you are still in Washington, with your
finger in some political pie.

MRS. GORDON

Yes. It's a big pie this time—and a rather hot one!
But the handsomest man I know is helping me to
pull it out of the political oven.

MRS. DEAN

A hot political pie. M-m-m. I remember hearing
the other day that you are interested in the Kirby
bill. Is that it?

MRS. GORDON

That is it.

MRS. DEAN

Then it *is* hot! Who is your cat's-paw this time?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

(Lightly.)

I don't quite like the way you put it, Isabel. However, the Senator from Oklahoma might answer your unflattering description.

MRS. DIXON

(To Miss Smith, almost under her breath.)

Did you hear that?

MISS SMITH

(Without interest.)

Something about some man, I s'pose. It always is.

(Professionally.)

You can sleep on that hair three nights—if you lay on your face and don't turn over. But you must wear this veil. Otherwise, it takes the freshness out.

(She puts a sheer veil turban-fashion around the coiffure.)

MRS. DIXON

I should think it would take your freshness out—to lay on your face three nights!

MISS SMITH

Not out of you. Out of the hair, I meant. With a

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

coy-fur like that a lady can stand anything. Good-mornin'.

(Exit Miss Smith.)

MRS. DEAN

Helen, you're playing a very dangerous game. Have you forgotten what was said about you and Senator Traynor in connection with the Wilcox bill? I hoped that experience would teach you a lesson.

MRS. GORDON

Calm yourself, my dear. Emotion is bad for the complexion.

CARRIE JONES

That's all, Mrs. Dean.

(Mrs. Dean rises and pays her.)

Good-morning.

(To Mrs. Gordon.)

I'll tell Madam you want the first manicure that comes in.

(Carrie Jones goes out. Mrs. Dean takes her hat and wrap from the hook where they hang.)

MRS. DEAN

You know I'm not prudish, but surely you realize that people are talking about you frightfully.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(Impulsively.)

Helen! Why don't you drop it all?

MRS. GORDON

I will, soon. First I'm going to do something that will make the gossips stop from sheer exhaustion.

(Deliberately.)

I'm going to be married.

MRS. DEAN

My dear—I'm glad. Matrimony will at least anchor you.

MRS. GORDON

Don't commit yourself.

(Laughing impishly.)

There are two persons I am sure will never approve of my marriage—you and the man's wife.

(Mrs. Dean stares at her; then, in silent but eloquent disapproval, she puts on her hat and veil before the mirror.)

MRS. DIXON

(Sibilantly.)

I know that voice!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

She comes here often. Now I'll put on the chin-strap for a little while.

(They listen to what follows. Miss Mulholland puts chin-straps and wrinkle-plasters on Mrs. Dixon's face.)

MRS. DEAN

(Turning to face Mrs. Gordon after putting on her hat.)

Helen, I don't understand you—and I don't want to. Good-bye.

(She starts toward the door.)

MRS. GORDON

(Rising.)

One moment, Isabel. I'm not hard to understand. No woman is who is alone in the world and poor, but with big ambitions. She wants money and power and the man who can give them to her. If he happens to be married to a woman who is a drag and a burden to him I think she is justified in helping him to remove that burden, for his sake as well as her own.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

(Ironically.)

By cold steel, I suppose—as you seem to stop at nothing!

MRS. GORDON

Oh no! By the painless process of our paternal divorce system. That's the modern method.

(Mrs. Dean makes a brusque movement of disapproval.)

Good-bye; I'll send you our wedding-cards.

MRS. DEAN

Don't take the trouble. This *is* good-bye, Helen.

(Exit Mrs. Dean.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

(To Mrs. Dixon.)

Now you set here and rest awhile. Then I'll come back and take off those straps.

MRS. DIXON

The electric bath is the only thing I've escaped to-day. I suppose you'll have me in that to-morrow.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

Yes. You'd better learn some poetry to-night.

(Exit Miss Mulholland, up center, through the swinging door.)

MRS. GORDON

(Going forward and glancing into Mrs. Dixon's compartment.)

I beg your pardon. I thought I heard Miss Mulholland speak.

MRS. DIXON

(Springing to her feet and facing her, all her pent-up anger and suffering breaking forth at sight of her rival.)

So-o! It's you, is it? No wonder I knew your voice! Now I understand what you're up to!

(Mrs. Gordon recoils under the shock of the unexpected onslaught. She recovers herself immediately and gazes at the grotesque figure before her. Mrs. Dixon still wears the apron and veil, and her face is covered by the chin-strap and the wrinkle-plasters.)

MRS. GORDON

(Icily.)

Are you asking me to believe that some one I know is concealed under this extraordinary disguise?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(Cuttingly.)

No one you know. Only the burden you say you're goin' to get rid of.

MRS. GORDON

It's the lady from Oklahoma!

(Looking about apprehensively.)

For heaven's sake, don't make a scene in this public place.

MRS. DIXON

You oughta thought about that when you talked me over a few minutes ago. 'Twas as public then as 'tis now.

MRS. GORDON

(Disdainfully.)

Why should you think I was speaking of your husband? No names were mentioned, Mrs. Dixon.

MRS. DIXON

Are you makin' a collection of husbands?

MRS. GORDON

(Pulling herself together.)

Suppose it was your husband!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(Insolently.)

As you seem to have listened, you may remember that I *said* the wife would not approve of my plan. You don't, do you?

MRS. DIXON

I'm no match for you. I know that. I'm just a poor, misguided fool. I oughta had sense enough to stay home, where I belong.

MRS. GORDON

I quite agree with you.

(She glances about again, apprehensively. Seeing the place wholly deserted, she recovers her expression of sang froid.)

MRS. DIXON

Now I'm here, I stay. D'ye hear me? I—*stay!* And you got to reckon with me in this plan of yours.

MRS. GORDON

H-m-m. That's very interesting. Do you mean that you're going to fight the divorce?

MRS. DIXON

I'm goin' to fight the divorce, an' you, an' Joe Dixon, too, if I got to. You can be mighty sure of that.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

It's well we have the place to ourselves for this discussion. You primitive women are so excitable. However, as we're here, I have something to say to you.

(Sternly.)

Sit down.

(She indicates a chair.)

MRS. DIXON

I won't.

(She draws back.)

MRS. GORDON

Very well. I will.

(She sits down.)

Perhaps you'll change your mind. I'm going to talk to you as if you were a rational human being instead of a grotesque virago. If you could look at this matter from the standpoint of a woman of the world—

MRS. DIXON

From your standpoint, you mean. Well, I can't. We don't know much about your standpoint out where I come from.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

Naturally. I don't expect miracles. Let us say from the standpoint of ordinary common sense. Here is the situation: You are married to a man who no longer loves you. He has developed. You have not. He has brains. You have not. He is climbing upward in life. He has outstripped you at every point. He doesn't want you. He wants his freedom. Why not be wise and let him have it?

MRS. DIXON

Because he don't know what he does want. I've always known what was good for Joe Dixon better than he knew himself. I know it better now.

MRS. GORDON

The cold facts are that you are clinging to a man who wants to get away. You can hold him by force for a time, but not long. Make a virtue of necessity and accept the inevitable. The world respects a wife who meets that situation with dignity.

MRS. DIXON

What does the world think of a woman who steals another woman's husband?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

(Wearily.)

There you go again, rushing into hysterics. You should be a heroine of melodrama.

(Patronizingly.)

Can't you realize that you will never accomplish anything until you learn to keep your temper? Do you imagine you're impressive now, acting as you act and looking as you look? You're inexpressibly ridiculous!

(She rises.)

MRS. DIXON

(Dully, her passion spent, sinking into a chair as she speaks.)

I guess you're right about that.

MRS. GORDON

Come now, Mrs. Dixon, be sensible. I'm not enjoying this talk. But since you began it, I'd like to come to some understanding.

(Urgently.)

Will you give Senator Dixon his freedom?

MRS. DIXON

Never!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

Then he'll take it.

MRS. DIXON

He can't get it! Joel Dixon's got no cause to divorce me. I'd like to see him try it among our folks out in Oklahoma that knows all I done for him. I've made that man what he is. He don't know it, but they do. Joe thinks I can't help him now in Washington. Well, I can't. But I've gone down into the mines with him, and I've rode on the trail with him, and I've froze with him, and I've starved with him. I've nursed him when he was ravin' with fever, and there wasn't a doctor within sixty miles. I've fed him with the last we had, when he didn't know it was the last. I've loved him all his life. I love him still. He's mine, and I'll keep him.

MRS. GORDON

You're hopeless.

MRS. DIXON

(Rising.)

It's more than Joe you want, too. You want him as your tool, to work your schemes. I heard you talk to Mrs. Dean in there. You can't have him. I'll get on your track. I know our other Senator and our

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Congressman. They'll introduce me around. I'll find out what you did to that man Traynor and what you're scheming to do to Joe now.

MRS. GORDON

(Losing her temper at last.)

Try it. I'll teach you a lesson.

(More calmly.)

So it's war, is it? Then sharpen your weapons. You will need them.

MRS. DIXON

Don't you worry. I'll use them.

MRS. GORDON

(Ironically.)

What do you use? Rapiers?

MRS. DIXON

(Dully.)

I dunno what rapiers is. Axes is more in my line.

MRS. GORDON

(Laughing.)

Oh, don't use axes! Try to be content with a little hatchet.

(Mrs. Gordon leaves. As she goes Mrs. Dean returns through the opposite door.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(Turning toward Mrs. Dean.)

Oh, Mrs. Dean, I've just made a fool of myself! Why did God let me do it? He made women and He made idiots, and I suppose sometimes He can't tell 'em apart Himself!

MRS. DEAN

What have you done?

MRS. DIXON

I'm not fit to be left alone yet. You ought to watch me every minute. I can't take things the way New York women do. I ain't been here long, but I've heard them talk.

(Artificially.)

"George lost every cent we had last week."

(Lightly.)

"I suppose we'll all be in the poor-house next week."

(Desperately.)

I can't talk or act like that when things happen. My God! When I'm down, I'm down.

MRS. DEAN

One of the things I intend to teach you is not to let people know when you are down. That's Life's primer lesson in self-control.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Teach me quick. I need it. And tell me something else. Am I making any headway? Do I know anything? Do I act as if I did?

MRS. DEAN

You have done all you could do in these few days. You have improved enormously in looks, though I admit you don't show it now. Take off those things. Let me see the effect this morning.

(Mrs. Dixon goes to the mirror and looks at herself.)

MRS. DIXON

And that Mulholland woman left me looking like this!

(She tears off the plasters, the chin-strap, and the veil.

Last of all she swiftly removes the big apron and stands revealed transformed. Her coiffure is wonderfully becoming. Her complexion is dazzling. Her gown is perfect in style and fit. She revolves slowly before Mrs. Dean, who nods with satisfaction.)

MRS. DEAN

Well done, little pupil!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(Returning to the mirror.)

Yes, I look all right. As long as I keep my mouth shut I am all right.

(She revolves before the mirror.)

My figure's pretty good. It's the new corsets and the fit of this dress. My color is better, too. All ain't lost while a woman's complexion lasts.

MRS. DEAN

You should be satisfied. You have started out to do certain things. The mirror shows you have accomplished a transformation. Check that off your list.

MRS. DIXON

(Nodding.)

I've done it in five days. Of course I ain't exactly *done* it, but I have it all on! And I've got you and Miss Herrick to help me with the other things. I've got to begin on them quick. Will I slip back if I go to Washington for a few weeks?

(An inspiration strikes her.)

I'll take you with me! I can't afford to lose one minute of culture.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

Wisdom is not dead, even in Washington.

MRS. DIXON

What's the hot political pie you and Mrs. Gordon talked about a few minutes ago?

MRS. DEAN

(Lightly.)

The Kirby bill? I'm afraid you wouldn't understand that. Politics come later in your course.

MRS. DIXON

Try me.

MRS. DEAN

The Kirby bill is probably a prettily disguised grab bill. I'm told that Senator Kirby has bought thousands of acres of waste land, full of malaria, at three dollars an acre. He's trying to sell them to the government for a pleasure park at one hundred dollars an acre. He will pocket a million or so, and divide the rest among philanthropic statesmen who helped him to put the bill through. That's all there is to it.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

That's enough.

MRS. DEAN

Senator Kirby calls it conservation.

MRS. DIXON

I know a better name for it. What's goin' to happen to the man that pulls that pie out of the oven?

MRS. DEAN

He's apt to get his fingers burned.

MRS. DIXON

Then I must try to keep him from pullin' it out—if he'll listen to me. He's my husband.

MRS. DEAN

My *dear*—

MRS. DIXON

You didn't know Mrs. Gordon's talk was about me, did you? You didn't know my husband was the Senator from Oklahoma? Don't worry. I can handle Mrs. Gordon. Do you know why? Not because I'm jealous. Not because I know anything. But because there's a love in me that's a whole lot bigger than I am.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

(Grasping the situation.)

I am *so* sorry! I didn't understand—

MRS. DIXON

Course you didn't. I want you to understand now. I've given Joe Dixon all he wanted all his life. Do you think I ain't big enough to give him his freedom too if that would make him happy? I am. I could do it, and be happy doing it, if it was for his good. But freedom ain't what Joe needs. It would be the worst thing he could have.

MRS. DEAN

(Ironically.)

It certainly would, with Helen Gordon at large.

MRS. DIXON

I'll look out for Joe. Trust me for that. Why, Mrs. Dean, he ain't just the husband I've worshiped all my life. He's the children I've never had. He's my dream come true. There's only about six feet of him, but I've never been able to see anything else above him, or below him, or around him. There's nothing but Joe Dixon in my world. There never has been. There never will be. That's the plain truth of it.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

I'm afraid he isn't worth such love.

MRS. DIXON

What's that got to do with it? If us women only loved the perfect men this would be a mighty lonesome world.

MRS. DEAN

It would be a world of lonesome men.

MRS. DIXON

Don't you make any mistake about Joe! He's a fool when it comes to a clever woman; but he's a man, all right! Or how did he make his way to where he's got? He began with nothing. Now he's a Senator and a millionaire.

MRS. DEAN

He has done well.

MRS. DIXON

He'll go higher yet if I can steer him past that si-reen. Ain't that what they call ladies that sits on the rocks? I've always watched over Joe. I'm going to keep right on.

MRS. DEAN

What can you do?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Half an hour ago I couldn't have told you. Since I've heard her talk, I've thought it out. Mrs. Gordon's got two strings to her bow—graft and matrimony.

MRS. DEAN

It's a bad pair.

MRS. DIXON

It is. If Joe gets onto the graft it will be all off with the matrimony. See?

MRS. DEAN

I see. If you can show up the Kirby bill to your husband you can show up Mrs. Gordon at the same time.

MRS. DIXON

That's it. I'll kill both my birds with one stone—if I can only hit 'em! They say a woman never can, but I'll have a try at it. Now, come on! Come on! We got just time to catch that one-o'clock train to Washington!

(She seizes her hat and coat, grasps Mrs. Dean's arm, and they exit hastily.)

CURTAIN

ACT III

ACT III

TIME:—*An afternoon in June, between three and four o'clock.*

SCENE:—*Miss Herrick's office. The curtain rises on the same scene as Act I. Freddy Belden is seated at Miss Herrick's desk, lolling back in her chair and idly fingering her pens, proofs, and the like. Near him sits Miss Jefferson, absorbed in a magazine.*

MISS JEFFERSON

(Dropping the magazine.)

Freddy, when Miss Herrick goes up to the composing-room, how long does she stay there?

FREDDY

Until people who are waiting here go away. Now tell *me* something. What is Mrs. Dixon doing in Washington?

MISS JEFFERSON

Your mind is not mature enough to understand.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

It understands this much: Mrs. Dixon is spreading a net for something. I want to know what it is, and whether she will catch it.

MISS JEFFERSON

Keep cool. She got back from Washington this morning. She's coming here this afternoon for an important meeting. When she arrives, dear Freddy, I'm afraid you will have to go.

FREDDY

On the contrary, nothing could tear me away. I'll wait, though I know it's dangerous. Here I am, young, helpless, and alone with you.

MISS JEFFERSON

You are a very impertinent boy.

FREDDY

Take me in hand. Improve me. Make any change you like. Suppose you begin by developing my higher nature. I'll give you seven months to do it in!

MISS JEFFERSON

No, thanks; too hopeless. If there happened to be anything wrong with your grammar—

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

(Excitedly.)

It's my weakest point—my words has always went wrong. Can you learn me how to talk good, every day from ten to five?

MISS JEFFERSON

How can I? I hear you have engaged yourself to Miss Mulholland for beauty treatment every day from ten to one, and to Miss Smith for moral training every afternoon from two to six.

FREDDY

(Thoughtfully.)

Miss Mulholland? Miss Smith? Where have I heard those names before?

MISS JEFFERSON

(Rising.)

They'll come back to you out of the mists of time, if you think hard enough.

FREDDY

(Jumping up.)

Don't go! I can think while you're here—though, of course, I can't think of anything but you. Don't

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

you realize that to me you're the only girl in the universe?

MISS JEFFERSON

(Sitting down again and looking at him with interest.)
How many hours is it since you said that to Miss Mulholland?

FREDDY

That name again! Mulholland. *Mulholland*. Now, the name of Smith I *know* I've heard somewhere. But Mulholland—

MISS JEFFERSON

You can't recall it?

FREDDY

(Firmly.)

If I ever do, I'll tell you.

(Tenderly.)

There's one name engraved on my heart—*Virginia!*

(He bends over her devotedly.)

(Miss Mulholland enters. She wears a perfectly fitting princess gown, but no hat. Her sleeves are protected by the long cuffs typewriters use. Her coiffure is extremely elaborate.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Hesitating at the door.)

Excuse me. I thought Miss Herrick was here.

MISS JEFFERSON

(Nodding to her.)

How do you do, Miss Mulholland. Miss Herrick fled when Mr. Belden came.

(Mischievously.)

You have met Mr. Belden, haven't you?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Warmly.)

Well, I guess. How do, Freddy?

FREDDY

(Dazed and overcome.)

Why—how do you do?

MISS MULHOLLAND

As cool as that, are you?

(To Miss Jefferson.)

Ain't it enough to raise a crop of daisies on my grave?

Every time I meet him outside the manicure parlors

he acts like this. But *in* the parlors—

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

(Hurriedly.)

We met here several months ago, too, didn't we?
You came to see my cousin.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(To Miss Jefferson.)

Now he's pretendin' he hasn't seen me since. An'
me pourin' out soothin' syrup for him every day last
month.

FREDDY

(Hastily.)

You—you came in so suddenly you surprised me.
You look quite at home here.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Proudly.)

Why wouldn't I? I got a job here now! I'm a
typewriter.

FREDDY

A typewriter?

(To Miss Jefferson.)

I'll bet beauty shrieked when Miss Mulholland fell
into the new job.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

Madam O'Reilly shrieked, all right.

(Elegantly.)

Miss Herrick give me the position to get me away from the demoralizing influence of the beauty parlors. I regard it as the first ascendin' step in a literary career.

FREDDY

(Admiringly.)

What beautiful words you use, Miss Mulholland!

MISS MULHOLLAND

I'm goin' to use some more. Miss Herrick says I'm to be pertected now. *You* got to keep away from my desk!

MISS JEFFERSON

(Giving way to mirth.)

Oh, Freddy, Freddy! This is *too* good!

FREDDY

Protected! Great heavens! What do you mean?

(He gets behind Miss Jefferson and signals to Miss Mulholland imploringly.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Confidentially.)

I don't believe this place is any safer than the beauty parlors. The engineer an' fireman is in my office this minute. That's why I came in here. Only this mornin' *three* agents from the typewriter company come to put a new ribbon on—

FREDDY

(With interest.)

On your hair?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Icily.)

No, Freddy Belden, on my typewriter.

FREDDY

They'll be putting ribbons on your hair inside of a week. I see their finish. Never mind, I will protect you from them. *That's* what Ruth meant. Come, be comfortable. They also work who only sit and wait.

(He offers her Miss Herrick's chair.)

MISS MULHOLLAND

No, thanks. I ain't hopin' to fill that chair just yet.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

A little later, perhaps? A few weeks? Wait here till then!

MISS MULHOLLAND

The more the merrier, for you!

(She starts toward the door.)

FREDDY

One moment, Miss Mulholland.

(She stops. Freddy gets between her and the door and pauses impressively before her.)

FREDDY

I will overlook your thoughtless words. But answer this question frankly: Did you or did you not tell Miss Birdie Smith and Madam Hortense O'Reilly that I am your ideal man?

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Horried.)

Indeed, Mr. Belden, I never said no such thing—not to nobody!

(To Miss Jefferson.)

Don't you believe him. Besides—

(Firmly.)

—You ain't!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

(Crestfallen.)

I ain't?

MISS MULHOLLAND

No, Mr. Belden. I like your high spirits, but, since you ask me, I will say—

(Darkly.)

—There's things in you I don't approve.

FREDDY

Stop right there, Miss Mulholland. You need't say what they are! I don't know where this splendid candor might lead you. But, if it's a fair question—have you ever met your ideal man?

MISS MULHOLLAND

I have. He's the grandest man I ever knew.

MISS JEFFERSON

Tell us about him. The contrast might help Mr. Belden.

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Reminiscently, leaning against a chair.)

Well, he come into Madam O'Reilly's manicure

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

parlors about five one night las' spring, an' by the time I'd done his nails 'twas six. While I was workin' he never said a word, except about the weather an' the air-ships. But when I was through he ast me to go to dinner with him that night, an' see a play afterward.

FREDDY

I'd do *that* any time!

MISS MULHOLLAND

They all would. 'Twas the *way* he done it.

FREDDY

I see. Some have the ways and some only have the means!

MISS MULHOLLAND

This man had both. He had such nice sad eyes, too. I went. He took me to a big restaurong, an' say—I wish you could 'a' seen the dinner he ordered! Clams an' sweetbreads, ducks an' lobsters, an' champagne. But he never said one word, except about the plays in town. He didn't even say he was lonesome.

FREDDY

I can order a *better* dinner than that.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS MULHOLLAND

'T'was the *way* he done it, I tell you. We had a quart and a pint of champagne, but he never said one word. He didn't even tell me his wife didn't understand him. Then we went to a music-hall, an' he got a box.

FREDDY

Why wouldn't he? A box is the safest place to put a jewel in.

MISS MULHOLLAND

Ain't I tellin' y' it was the *way* he done it? Afterward we had supper, an' more champagne. But he didn't say one word, except about the singin' and dancin'. He didn't even say a girl like me needed some one to advise her. He got a cab an' we started home.

FREDDY

(Indifferently.)

A dull evening, I call it.

MISS MULHOLLAND

When the cab was half a block from where I lived he stopped it an' we descended. "I'll ask you to walk these few steps, Miss Mulholland," he says, "lest the neighbors talk," he says.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

(Awestruck.)

I'd never have thought of that!

MISS MULHOLLAND

None of 'em would. That ain't all. When we got to the door he took off his hat an' held it in his hand. "Good-night, Miss Mulholland," he says, just like that. "I thank you for a pleasant evenin'," he says, "which I shall always remember," he says. An' then—

(She pauses dramatically.)

FREDDY

And then?

MISS JEFFERSON

Yes, then—

MISS MULHOLLAND

(Triumphantly.)

Then that man put on his hat an' went away.

(She sighs.)

Well, it's somethin' to remember. I must go now. I got letters to copy.

(She goes to the door, opens it, closes it again hastily, and turns to Miss Jefferson and Freddy.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Wouldn't that jar you out of your orbit? There's six men waitin' for me this minute! My Gawd, what is there about me—

(She draws herself up, opens the door again, and goes out. Mrs. Dixon enters. She greets Miss Jefferson and Freddy. She is wearing an automobile coat which she removes at once, showing herself exquisitely dressed in summer garments. Her speech has now reached the stage where progress is shown by instantaneous correction of mistakes.)

FREDDY

I've just been talking about you, Mrs. Dixon. But, then—

(Tenderly.)

—I usually am.

MRS. DIXON

Yes, Freddy, I know. I guess it's lucky for us both I ain't—*am not*—twenty years younger!

FREDDY

Keep on the way you're going and you will be! Will you wait for me till I grow up?

MRS. DIXON

You want to be my husband's understudy, do you? That shows I am getting on.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(Miss Herrick enters, immaculately dressed in white linen. She carries a bunch of galley-proofs.)

MRS. DIXON

Here I am, Miss Herrick, on the dot.

MISS HERRICK

You're always punctual.

MISS JEFFERSON

Softly, Mrs. Dixon, please. Try to cultivate more suavity of tone.

MRS. DIXON

(To Miss Herrick, with a martyred air.)

Now it's suavity of tone she's after. When I talk like this *(she utters the words brusquely)* it ain't suave.

When I talk like this *(she gives the words a velvety finish)* it is suave.

(Contentedly.)

I can see the difference myself.

MISS HERRICK

So can I. You're doing beautifully.

MRS. DIXON

Hasn't Colonel Belden come?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

Not yet.

MRS. DIXON

But you're sure he's coming? It's awful—*very*—kind of him to do so much for me.

MISS HERRICK

He has two good reasons. First, he likes you. Second, he wants to defeat the Kirby bill. He will help you all he can.

FREDDY

(*Eagerly.*)

Secrets! Does father know? Tell me!

MRS. DIXON

Yes, it's secrets—if a big political scandal is ever a secret.

(*Dreamily.*)

Seems to me most every one knows this secret except Joe Dixon.

FREDDY

(*To Virginia.*)

She *has* something in her net!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

I've got the biggest netful you ever saw—if I can only land it!

MISS HERRICK

(Taking up a paper from her desk. It is blue, the other papers being white.)

Colonel Belden sent me the statement you got for him.

MRS. DIXON

There's the whole inside story of the Kirby bill—names, dates, and places.

MISS HERRICK

Is it to be published?

MRS. DIXON

No. Mr. Rathburn, of the New York *Planet*, wrote it for his paper. But the editor won't print it. He says he believes it's true, but it might cause a libel suit, and we haven't got legal proofs.

MISS JEFFERSON

Can't you get them?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

No. We've tried everything. First I went to see the other Senator from Oklahoma, and our Congressmen. They didn't know any more than Freddy here!

(Unobserved by the rest, Freddy has edged round behind Miss Herrick, and is reading the statement, still held in her hand.)

And they weren't half as interested. Then Mr. Rathburn came to see me. He's the Washington correspondent of the New York *Planet*, and that polite—

(Suavely.)

—So very polite! He pretended to be interested in Joe. But I saw through him!

(To Miss Jefferson.)

Can I say "saw through him"?

MISS JEFFERSON

It is an idiom; it expresses the case very well.

MRS. DIXON

I never shall know when it's an idiom and when it's only vulgar. Anyway, I saw Rathburn was beginning to see something mighty queer in the Kirby bill. So I laid down my hand to that reporter, every

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

card on the table. We worked together. You wouldn't believe the people we saw and the things we found out! But it was all hearsay. We can't get the *Planet* to print it.

MISS HERRICK

You're up against a theory of "sound journalism." A thing may be true as gospel, but if you can't prove it in a lawsuit it's libel.

MRS. DIXON

I know it. I found out that Senator Matthews was paid five thousand dollars for his vote. Don't I wish I had a photograph of that check!

MISS JEFFERSON

If you haven't proofs, what have you?

MRS. DIXON

Nothing but facts. I've got to make my husband believe the simple truth against the word of the Kirby crowd and Mrs. Gordon. The point is, can I do it?

(*Restlessly.*)

You're sure Colonel Belden's coming?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

Quite sure.

(*Looking at her watch.*)

He isn't due for five minutes.

MRS. DIXON

Let's forget Kirby's bill for a few minutes.

(*With affected elegance.*)

It's getting on my nerves!

(*Deliberately changing the subject.*)

I'm going to my first dinner-party to-morrow night.

MISS HERRICK

Your first dinner?

MRS. DIXON

Yes. Mrs. Twombly's giving it for me—on Mrs. Dean's account, I guess.

(*Confidentially.*)

I'm *terribly* scared—*nervous* about it. Now tell me. When I meet the other guests shall I act as if I knew everything, and let them find out I don't? Or shall I tell them I don't know a thing, and let them get over it?

MISS HERRICK

Don't say an unnecessary word. Listen intelligently.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Fill the pauses with smiles. Your smile is charming.
(*Mrs. Dixon opens a vanity-box, finds a mirror, grins into it, and regards the result with unlifted gloom. Then she turns and smiles appealingly at Miss Jefferson.*)

MRS. DIXON

(*Mournfully.*)

I can't find any charm in it.

MISS JEFFERSON

Never mind. The other guests will.

MRS. DIXON

Mrs. Dean knows the men I'm going to set—*sit* between. One of 'em—one of *them* is Western. We can talk about home. He's a mining man, an' I guess I have not listened to Joel Dixon talk mines at every meal I've et—I *have eaten* for twenty years without learning something about mines, too. Him and me—

MISS JEFFERSON

Oh-h-h-h!

MRS. DIXON

(*Despairingly.*)

Oh! That was pretty bad, wasn't it? Two of my

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

seven months gone, and I say, "him and me"! Ain't it discouragin'? Oh, heavens; now I say, "ain't"!

MISS JEFFERSON

Begin over.

MRS. DIXON

All right. One of the men is Western. *He and I* will get on all right. But the other man at the dinner is an author, and why they put him next to me—
(*Her voice rises to a wail.*)

—I'm sure I dunno—I *don't know*.

FREDDY

Let's have a rehearsal, Mrs. Dixon. I'll be the author. Here's the table.

(*He draws an imaginary table into the center of the stage.*)

MISS JEFFERSON

I'll be the English butler.

(*Freddy seats Mrs. Dixon, takes another chair, places it near hers and sits down beside her, unfolding an imaginary napkin. Mrs. Dixon unfolds an imaginary napkin also, places it in her lap, fusses over it, surveys the place where knives and forks ought to be, and looks nervous. Miss Jefferson,*

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

offering a dish at Mrs. Dixon's left, drops an imaginary plate, and Freddy and Mrs. Dixon start nervously.)

FREDDY

(Severely, to Miss Jefferson.)

You go when your month is up, Thomas.

MISS JEFFERSON

(Haughtily.)

Pardon, sir. Hi was going any'ow! Hi'm only used to the best, sir!

(She offers Mrs. Dixon a dish from the right side.)

MRS. DIXON

Ain't you on my wrong side, Thomas?

MISS JEFFERSON

Pardon, madam. The gentleman got me that upset, wot with dischargin' me—

(She hurriedly changes and serves Mrs. Dixon an imaginary dish from the left side.)

MRS. DIXON

(Grinning ecstatically.)

That's more than I knew a month ago.

(Miss Jefferson takes her place at Freddy's right, in-

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

verts an imaginary decanter, and pours indefinitely, looking exhausted the while.)

FREDDY

(Irritably.)

Thomas, what are you doing?

MISS JEFFERSON

(Humbly.)

Tryin' to keep your glasses filled, sir.

FREDDY

(Coldly.)

I thought you were trying to be a living picture.

(He inverts his imaginary glasses and pretends to eat stolidly.)

MRS. DIXON

(To Freddy.)

Why don't you say something?

FREDDY

Probably an author wouldn't, you know. He'd expect you to entertain him.

MRS. DIXON

Mercy! what will I do? He's got to say something to start me off, hasn't he?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

No, you've got to start *him* off. Go ahead.

MRS. DIXON

(*Timidly.*)

How do you think of all the interesting things you say in your books?

FREDDY

Excellent! And sanctioned by our best traditions!
(*He assumes a lofty manner, smiles condescendingly,
and leans toward her with interest, speaking in an
assumed voice.*)

Ah—what special book have you in mind?

MRS. DIXON

(*Artificially.*)

I'm reading *The Iron Woman* now.

FREDDY

(*In his natural voice.*)

Great heavens! That won't do. You must speak to him about one of his own books! He doesn't care about any one else's books!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(*Feebly.*)

But I haven't read none—*any*—of his books. I only got back from Washington at three o'clock.

FREDDY

(*Gloomily, rising and regarding her.*)

Then you're done for! You ought to be reading one now. You ought to have one in each hand. You could have talked to him about them all through dinner, and he'd have been a perfectly happy man.

MRS. DIXON

Perhaps I could give him the one-minute Shakespeare talk Mrs. Dean taught me. I've only read "Hamlet" and "Romeo," though. Heaven knows what I'd say if he asked me about any of the rest.

FREDDY

Wouldn't do at all—not to another author. Sure to make him jealous.

MRS. DIXON

(*Restlessly, to Miss Herrick, who is hard at work at her desk.*)

Isn't it time yet for Colonel Belden?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

He may be five minutes late. Are you sure Senator Dixon is coming?

MRS. DIXON

No—but I think he'll come.

FREDDY

Meantime, here's this dinner. Let's go on with that.

(They resume their places at the imaginary table.

Freddy helps himself to an imaginary dish, served by Miss Jefferson, at his left.)

MISS JEFFERSON

(To Freddy, in a hoarse aside.)

Don't eat all the food, sir. There's hother guests present.

FREDDY

Thomas, what did you do before you began to buttle?
Shovel coal?

MISS JEFFERSON

Yes, sir. The arm swing comes in 'andy while servin' you, sir.

(She shovels imaginary food on his plate.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

I don't suppose I ever will remember whether you eat *out* or eat *in* with your knives and forks, though Mrs. Dean tells me every day. What's that fork for, Freddy?

(She indicates a spot. They both look.)

FREDDY

That? Prunes! But here's the one that will puzzle you.

(He points it out.)

When you see that fork, Mrs. Dixon—that little one with the crimped sides, shun it!

MRS. DIXON

Why?

FREDDY

(In solemn tones.)

That's the fork they all ask about in the *Ladies' Home Journal*.

(Mrs. Dixon looks at the spot with round eyes. Then she springs to her feet.)

MRS. DIXON

Good heavens, how nervous I am! In the next half hour I've got to save my husband an' my country. An' here I am wastin' time on table manners!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

TIM

(Entering.)

Colonel Belden's here, Miss Herrick.

MISS HERRICK

(Rising.)

Why, Uncle, how formal you are!

(Colonel Belden—a handsome, middle-aged military man—follows close behind Tim. Miss Herrick greets him affectionately. Mrs. Dixon turns to him eagerly. He shakes hands with her with evident pleasure.)

COLONEL BELDEN

(To Mrs. Dixon.)

Senator Dixon left Washington this morning. He will be in this office at four o'clock.

MRS. DIXON

Good!

FREDDY

The rest of you may stay while Mrs. Dixon and father give me their entire confidence.

COLONEL BELDEN

You impudent young cub! Clear out, now, while your elders take up the serious business of life.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

Will you come too, Virginia ?

MISS JEFFERSON

(Glancing at Mrs. Dixon.)

Not being urged to stay, I will go to the inner office and keep you company.

(Exit Freddy and Miss Jefferson.)

MRS. DIXON

(Turning to Miss Herrick and Colonel Belden.)

What a trump you have been, Miss Herrick! And you, too, Colonel! If I spent the rest of my life thanking you both for all you have done I couldn't say enough.

MISS HERRICK

We're very proud of you, Mrs. Dixon.

MRS. DIXON

Wait till you see how I come through the next half hour. The hardest work of my life is cut out for me right here and now.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

COLONEL BELDEN

It's a big job. Kirby's as clever as they make them.

MRS. DIXON

It makes my soul sick when I look into the net Freddy talks about, and see Kirby and Mrs. Gordon and a dozen others squirming at the bottom of it—with Joe Dixon ready to fall in next.

MISS HERRICK

He hasn't fallen yet.

MRS. DIXON

(*Grimly.*)

No. He's to fall at seven o'clock.

(*Looking at her watch.*)

It's four now.

MISS HERRICK

Good heavens! Why aren't you still in Washington, with all that going on?

MRS. DIXON

It ain't going on in Washington. It's going on in New York—to-night! Kirby's here to give a big dinner to the syndicate that's back of his bill. They

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

need one more vote. They've got to get it before Congress adjourns this week!

COLONEL BELDEN

(To Miss Herrick.)

They expect to get it from Senator Dixon. He came to New York to go to the dinner. That's how I managed to make the appointment with him.

MISS HERRICK

(Looking at her watch.)

He's late.

TIM

(Entering.)

Senator Dixon's here, Miss Herrick. He says he expects to meet Colonel Belden.

MISS HERRICK

One moment, Tim.

(She turns to Mrs. Dixon.)

MRS. DIXON

Colonel, tell him all we know, but don't mention me. I'll wait outside. I can't see Joe yet.

(She goes out.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

Ask Senator Dixon to come in, Tim.

(Exit Tim. Senator Dixon and Mrs. Gordon enter. Dixon is a superb type of the Western American, handsome, well dressed, and extremely well satisfied with himself. He speaks with crisp authority, and evidently expects to be listened to.)

COLONEL BELDEN

(Advancing.)

Senator, I've invited you here at the request of a friend of yours, to give you some important information.

SENATOR DIXON

(Shaking hands.)

That sounds good.

COLONEL BELDEN

Much of the information is confidential. My niece, Miss Herrick *(Dixon and Miss Herrick bow)*, knows the facts, but—I thought you would be alone.
(He glances at Mrs. Gordon.)

SENATOR DIXON

Colonel, this lady is Mrs. Herbert Gordon, of Washington. I'm willing to trust her with any secrets of mine.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

COLONEL BELDEN

(Bowling to the lady.)

I'll say this much. Senator, you're here in New York to go to Kirby's dinner to-night. If you go it will be a big mistake.

SENATOR DIXON

I'm not good at puzzles, Belden. What's the answer?

MRS. GORDON

(Coolly.)

I will tell you. This is a plan of the opposition.

COLONEL BELDEN

We haven't time to mince words, Senator. Kirby and his crowd are trying to drag you into what is nothing more nor less than a swindle.

SENATOR DIXON

Be careful, Belden. You're talking about my friends and associates.

COLONEL BELDEN

Then you choose your friends carelessly. The men back of that Park bill are Kirby, a grafter and a

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

hypocrite; Matthews, whose own State has turned him down; Jackson, a self-confessed liar and trickster. You're in bad company, Senator Dixon. It's time you knew it.

SENATOR DIXON

Belden, I didn't come here to-day to listen to your opinions of my political associates. I've got my own opinions. It will take more than yours to change them.

MRS. GORDON

This is not clever of you, Colonel. I thought you could do better.

SENATOR DIXON

Yes, Belden, drop your little "Who's Who" and come to the point.

COLONEL BELDEN

The point is that Kirby's National Park bill is a colossal steal. Are you going to vote for it?

MRS. GORDON

Really, I'm enjoying this. It's so artless!

COLONEL BELDEN

I see you are interested. Frankly, Mrs. Gordon, it is generally understood that you are lobbying for Kirby's bill.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

"Lobbying" is an unpleasant word, Colonel. I am interested in the bill, like every one else who believes in conservation.

COLONEL BELDEN

Has Senator Dixon asked you to come on from Washington to advise with us?

MRS. GORDON

(Languidly.)

I'm afraid I shouldn't have thought the consultation sufficiently important. No, Colonel, I'm in New York on other business. I met Senator Dixon on the train.

MISS HERRICK

(Suavely.)

An interesting coincidence!

MRS. GORDON

(Smiling at her.)

Wasn't it? So fortunate. He mentioned this appointment with Colonel Belden.

SENATOR DIXON

And I asked Mrs. Gordon to come here with me.

(He turns to Belden.)

THE LADY, FROM OKLAHOMA

I don't like your manner, Belden. Now, I want you to understand just where Mrs. Gordon stands in this matter. She has spent her life in Washington. She knows statesmen and national politics from A to Z. I'm a greenhorn, and I know it. Mrs. Gordon has taught me a lot.

MRS. GORDON

I never met a new-comer who learned so fast.

SENATOR DIXON

That's because you never met another one that had such a good teacher.

(To Belden.)

Washington is full of tricky ways and jealousy and backbiting. I found myself in the thick of it. How could I know who was honest and who wasn't?

COLONEL BELDEN

I invited you here to-day to give you a short and accurate list of some who are not honest.

SENATOR DIXON

Thanks. I'll listen to you, or to anybody, if you'll remember that it's facts I want, not theories.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

Theories are Colonel Belden's specialty, Senator.
(*To Belden.*)

Pardon me if I put Senator Dixon in touch with your political record. Your interest in his affairs makes it necessary. You began as a leading spirit in the League for Good Government. Good Government! It was a beautiful title, but what you did was so childish that very soon the newspapers began to call you Goo-Goos. Goo Goo! A baby gurgling in his cradle couldn't have been more blind to things as they are.

SENATOR DIXON

(*Laughing.*)

That's right out from the shoulder, Belden. But notice that the blow ain't given behind your back.

COLONEL BELDEN

(*Stiffly.*)

The lady is at liberty to express her opinion.

SENATOR DIXON

(*Still laughing and regarding Mrs. Gordon admiringly.*)

By George! she seems to be.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

I haven't quite finished my brief biographical sketch. To-day, Colonel, your infant organization can't even say, "goo goo"! It has been put into a nice little white coffin—and buried!

SENATOR DIXON

(Cheerfully.)

Got anything to say, Belden? We're here for a talk, you know.

MRS. GORDON

(Smiling at him.)

Pardon. I still have the floor. Colonel Belden next shone in the administration of a reform Mayor of New York.

(To Belden.)

Your blindness to facts soon disgusted the very people who had voted you into office. So the next election was a landslide for the grafters.

COLONEL BELDEN

(Suavely.)

I'm glad you remember that, Mrs. Gordon. Several of your friends, stanch supporters now of Kirby's bill, got offices that time, and fattened visibly on them.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

So the goo goos gurgled. But the gurgles were like your assertions of to-day—theories, Colonel, not facts.

COLONEL BELDEN

(Coolly.)

Senator Traynor was one of the little Jack Horners who stuck a thumb into that pie. There was proof enough that he pulled out some plums.

MRS. GORDON

You see, Senator Dixon? I told you they would bring up Traynor before they got through.

SENATOR DIXON

(With sudden dignity.)

Colonel Belden, Mrs. Gordon has explained that Traynor matter to my entire satisfaction. It happened in her extreme youth, and she believed in his bill. She was deceived in the character of Traynor.

MISS HERRICK

(Smiling.)

The Traynor episode happened exactly three years ago.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

(Smiling back insolently.)

What a memory!

(To Dixon.)

The important fact is that I had to deal with a man steeped in duplicity.

COLONEL BELDEN

(To Dixon.)

The fact I am trying to drive home is that Mrs. Gordon's present associates—the prime movers in the Kirby bill—are of the same stripe as the notorious Traynor. They're for graft—first, last, always.

SENATOR DIXON

Do you suppose I haven't heard that talk before? I have. I've even talked it over with the men themselves. They know what their enemies are saying.

COLONEL BELDEN

Am I to understand, Senator Dixon, that you referred the question of Kirby's honesty to Kirby himself?

SENATOR DIXON

(Losing his temper.)

Who the devil would I go to if not to Kirby?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(Horried at himself.)

Excuse me, Mrs. Gordon, Miss Herrick.

(To Belden.)

What I mean is that after I had heard what his enemies said I went to Kirby and listened to his side.

COLONEL BELDEN

You liked his side better ?

SENATOR DIXON

I found it more convincing, sir.

COLONEL BELDEN

Then you didn't consult the men in Washington who think as we do of Kirby's crowd ?

MRS. GORDON

A strong man does not take counsel of his enemies.

COLONEL BELDEN

A wise man takes counsel wherever he can get it before he decides who are his enemies.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

Great Scott! I didn't have to consult either side. They all came to me hotfoot with their different stories. I got it day and night. Of course, Belden, you realize that there's a big fight over this thing, with strong men on both sides. Naturally, it all rattled me—new as I was in the field. But Mrs. Gordon helped me to get things clear in my mind.

MRS. GORDON

Thank you, Senator. That helps *me* to endure this trying interview.

SENATOR DIXON

I was wrong to ask you to come here.

(To Belden.)

We're going round like squirrels in a cage, Belden. Let's get somewhere or quit trying. Here's where I stand. I've heard both sides of the Kirby matter. I've weighed the evidence. Now, I believe in Kirby and his bill—and it's going to take more than you've shown me yet to shake that belief.

COLONEL BELDEN

We have some facts right here that are new to you, I think.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(He picks up the blue paper.)

Moreover, there's an element in the case—

(He breaks off and adds)

I do full justice to Mrs. Gordon's charm and ability. But in this matter, Senator, her advice is not disinterested. She has too much at stake.

SENATOR DIXON

(With concentrated anger.)

I suppose you mean well, Belden, but you're going too far. As for that stuff—*(he indicates the blue manuscript still in Belden's hand)*—I ain't got time to read it.

(Mrs. Gordon shows great relief. She flashes a triumphant glance at the Colonel.)

MRS. GORDON

Let him run on, Senator. He interests me.

SENATOR DIXON

(Going to her, taking her hand, and speaking with deep feeling.)

Mrs. Gordon, we owe you an apology for even speaking about such things. I oughtn't to have listened. But one thing I guess you know. Nothing he says can make me believe—

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

I'm not afraid. I know I am safe in your hands.

SENATOR DIXON

You may feel pretty sure of that. There ain't many things in life more certain.

(Abruptly.)

We don't know much about each other, Belden, but the more I think of what you have said, the more I resent it. It's an outrage.

COLONEL BELDEN

(Keeping his temper.)

Hold on, Senator. Be good enough to remember that this is not my affair. I have told you only what your friend asked me to say to you.

SENATOR DIXON

(Interrupting fiercely.)

To hell with that friend!

(Again horrified at himself.)

Excuse me, Mrs. Gordon, Miss Herrick.

(To Belden.)

When I want my friends to butt into my private business I'll let 'em know. Tell that interferin' fool I said so, whoever he is!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

COLONEL BELDEN

(Coldly.)

Better wait a bit, Dixon. If you would read this statement it would put a different light on things.

MRS. GORDON

The opposition must be getting desperate when they resort to methods like this. Shall we go? I'm sure you don't care to waste more time.

SENATOR DIXON

I want to get out of here as quick as I can.

COLONEL BELDEN

We're doing you a good turn. In common justice you owe us a chance to prove what we say.

SENATOR DIXON

(Grimly.)

All right. Go ahead. *Prove* it! The quicker, the better.

COLONEL BELDEN

Here's the statement.

SENATOR DIXON

(Taking the statement, glancing over it, and handing it back.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Looks like the same old stuff. I can't stop to read thirty pages of typewritin'. I've got a dinner engagement.

COLONEL BELDEN

(Grimly.)

I know you have. Can't you understand, Dixon, that if you go to that dinner and the newspapers report your presence, as they will do, you will be regarded as one of Kirby's backers? For God's sake, man, and for the sake of your political future, stop and see the position you are in! Kirby and his gang are desperate. They are closing in around you like a pack of wolves.

SENATOR DIXON

Why are you in this? Who's my mysterious friend?

COLONEL BELDEN

You'll know later. Won't you read this statement?

SENATOR DIXON

I'll be hanged if I do! I've had enough of this infernal nonsense.

(Apologetically.)

Excuse me for gettin' excited, Mrs. Gordon, but this

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

thing has riled me up. If you knew how sick I am of the Kirby bill! I'll be glad when it's passed.

COLONEL BELDEN

You'll be a lot more sick of it then than now.

MRS. GORDON

Come, Senator. Surely we need not stay here longer.
(*He turns to her.*)

SENATOR DIXON

We'll go.

(*They start toward the door [right]. They are thus with their backs toward the upper door [left], which now opens suddenly, admitting Mrs. Dixon. She is obviously in great mental excitement. Seeing the group at the other door, she slips along the side of the room and seats herself in a chair sheltered by Ruth Herrick's desk. Miss Herrick and Colonel Belden see her. The others do not.*)

MRS. GORDON

(*ICILY, as they go.*)

How much do you suppose they're getting paid for this, Senator?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

COLONEL BELDEN

(Incisively.)

Dixon, are you *afraid* to read the truth? So far we have assumed that you are an honest man who is being fooled. But—

SENATOR DIXON

(Turning and going toward him.)

Stop right there! No man shall say a thing like that to me! What d'ye mean by it?

(Colonel Belden steps aside quickly.)

MRS. GORDON

(With great uneasiness.)

Senator, I beg you to come. Don't quarrel here.

SENATOR DIXON

(To Belden.)

I'll settle with you later for that insult. As for your confounded statement, I wouldn't read it if I had a thousand years to do it in!

MRS. DIXON

(Emerging from behind the desk and coming toward him.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Yes you will, Joel Dixon! You'll read it right now!
(*She takes the statement from Belden and offers it to her husband. He starts back, staring, unable to believe the evidence of his senses.*)

SENATOR DIXON

Harriet! You! You! Harriet!
(*He looks her up and down from head to foot, approaching her as he does so. Then, fiercely, after he has taken in the great change in her appearance.*)
What are you doing here?

MRS. DIXON

(*Very quietly.*)
I'm studyin' the Kirby bill, for one thing.

SENATOR DIXON

I didn't know you were in New York. You don't understand this, Harriet—

MRS. DIXON

(*Slowly.*)
I understand it a good deal better than you do. I am the friend who got that statement. I brought you here to read it! Take it.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

(Impressively.)

I've had enough of this, Senator. I wish to go.

MRS. DIXON

Which will you listen to, Joe?

SENATOR DIXON

You mustn't interfere in this matter, Harriet.

(To Mrs. Gordon.)

This is my wife.

(He looks from one to the other.)

MRS. GORDON

We have met before.

MRS. DIXON

(Ignoring her.)

Joel, read that statement!

(He takes it slowly, as if hypnotized, his eyes on his wife's face.)

MRS. GORDON

Aren't you forgetting your decision, Senator? Why waste time on that?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

By George, this Kirby business will drive me crazy!

(He hurls the statement down on the table.)

But I've taken my stand. I'll keep it. I'm ready,
Mrs. Gordon.

(He starts to go.)

MRS. DIXON

Joel, listen to me. Mr. Rathburn, the Washington correspondent of the New York *Planet*, will vouch for the truth of every word in that statement.

SENATOR DIXON

(Stopping suddenly.)

Rathburn! I know Rathburn. What's he got to do with it?

MRS. DIXON

(Calmly.)

A good deal. He wrote it!

SENATOR DIXON

He did, eh?

(Quickly.)

Is the *Planet* going to publish it?

MRS. DIXON

What's that got to do with it?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

A whole lot.

MRS. DIXON

Would you believe it quicker if it was printed in the *Planet*?

SENATOR DIXON

You bet I would! A reporter can amuse himself, if he wants to, writing charges against public men and letting 'em lay around. But if a newspaper prints 'em and they ain't true, that paper's got to stand a libel suit.

MRS. GORDON

(*Excitedly.*)

Is it coming out in the *Planet*?

(*Calming herself.*)

But how absurd! Of course the *Planet* isn't anxious for a libel suit.

(*Senator Dixon glances at her sharply.*)

SENATOR DIXON

I don't believe all I read in the newspapers by a long shot. But the *Planet* is pretty reliable. If it published that—

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(*Eagerly.*)

Would it change your stand-pat ideas on the Kirby bill?

SENATOR DIXON

I reckon it might.

(*Imperiously.*)

Here, tell me. *Is* the *Planet* going to publish that article?

MRS. DIXON

(*Firmly.*)

Yes.

MRS. GORDON

When?

MRS. DIXON

To-morrow morning!

SENATOR DIXON

By Jove!

MRS. GORDON

A likely story. Prove it.

MRS. DIXON

I'm not tryin' to prove anything to you, Mrs. Gordon.
I'm talkin' to my husband.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

(To Dixon.)

Oh, don't you see? It's all to gain time. If that was coming out to-morrow she wouldn't have the manuscript here.

MRS. DIXON

That's only a copy.

MRS. GORDON

Then why haven't you proof-sheets or something to show?

MRS. DIXON

It ain't in type yet. The proof-sheets are coming later.

(To Dixon.)

I'm sorry they won't get here in time for you to see 'em. Won't you read the statement instead?

SENATOR DIXON

No. If those proofs are coming here, I'll wait for them if it takes all night. I want to get to the bottom of this business now.

(To Mrs. Gordon.)

If the *Planet* has taken it up it looks serious.

(He sits down, as if for an indefinite wait.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

TIM

(Entering.)

Senator Kirby's on the main telephone, Miss Her-
rick. He wants to speak to Senator Dixon.

(Dixon rises, in surprise.)

SENATOR DIXON

How the deuce did Kirby know I was here? I
didn't tell him I was coming.

MRS. GORDON

I did. May I come too? I want a word with you.

SENATOR DIXON

(Looking at her sharply.)

Of course, Mrs. Gordon.

*(His manner has changed, becoming not exactly
suspicious, but very thoughtful. He opens the door
for her, and when she has passed through he follows
her.)*

COLONEL BELDEN

You're in a tight pocket, Mrs. Dixon. I'll go to the
Planet office and see if I can persuade Hotchkiss, the
editor, to publish this story to-morrow. But I'm not
hopeful. He swore yesterday he would not touch it.
(He reaches for the copy.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Don't take that. It's all we've got. Rathburn has another copy.

COLONEL BELDEN

Very well. Good-bye, then. Can you think of anything else I can do?

MRS. DIXON

Nothing, thank you.

(Colonel Belden goes out. Mrs. Dixon goes hurriedly to Miss Herrick's desk.)

MRS. DIXON

We've got a minute to plan. What'll I do—oh, what'll I do?

(She absently picks up the manuscript containing the Kirby statement, also some of Miss Herrick's proofs, glances thoughtfully from one to the other, and as she looks at them an inspiration comes to her. Her whole manner changes. She drops the proofs, turns to Miss Herrick with swift authority, and offers her the blue statement.)

MRS. DIXON

Miss Herrick, could you have this put into type

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

up-stairs and get proof-sheets that would look like they came from the *Planet* office?

(*Miss Herrick stares at her a second, then catches the idea.*)

MISS HERRICK

Yes.

MRS. DIXON

How quick could you do it?

MISS HERRICK

(*Grasping the manuscript.*)

I'll have it done within ten minutes if it takes every man in the composing-room!

MRS. DIXON

Good! Send it up!

MISS HERRICK

(*Snatching her blue pencil.*)

I must build a newspaper head for it—the big, sensational head-lines newspapers use, you know.

MRS. DIXON

Yes, yes! Make the top line tell about Kirby stealing a million!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

(Writing and reading the line aloud.)

“KIRBY’S MILLION-DOLLAR STEAL!”

MRS. DIXON

(Leaning over her.)

Good!

MISS HERRICK

(Reading the head-lines as fast as she writes them.)

“THOUSANDS FOR HIS FRIENDS, TOO, IF
HIS NATIONAL PARK BILL GOES
THROUGH”

MRS. DIXON

That’s it!

MISS HERRICK

“JACKSON AND MATTHEWS IN THE DEAL”

MRS. DIXON

Yes, yes!

MISS HERRICK

“THE INSIDE STORY OF A PHILANTHROPIST’S EFFORTS
TO DO HIS COUNTRYMEN GOOD!”

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THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

That's fine! Now rush it up.

(Miss Herrick pins the sheet with the head-lines to the manuscript, folds them, and sends the package up the tube. Then she turns to the speaking-tube. As she does so Mrs. Dixon goes to the door of the outer office, and Freddy enters from the inner room. Neither Miss Herrick nor Mrs. Dixon sees him. He stands silent, listening.)

MISS HERRICK

(Softly speaking through the tube.)

The foreman, please.

(She waits.)

Mr. Jackson, do me a good turn. I've just sent you a manuscript with unusual headlines. Set it in six or seven minutes if it takes every man in the place. It's vital. Don't stop to ask questions. Make the head-lines as striking as you can—big, black type. Copy the *Planet's* style. I'll explain later. Thank you.

(As she turns away, Mrs. Dixon opens the door and calls softly into the outer office.)

MRS. DIXON

Tim.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(*Tim enters.*)

Tim, how far is the *Planet* office from here?

TIM

'Bout two blocks.

MRS. DIXON

Run over there and find Colonel Belden. Tell him I want a big envelope with the *Planet* printed on it—the kind they send proof-sheets in. If he isn't there get one from Mr. Rathburn or some one else.

TIM

Yes'm.

MRS. DIXON

When you get it run back here, and get the new proofs Mr. Jackson will have ready for Miss Herrick up in the composing-room. Put the proofs in the envelope. Then seal it, write my name on it, and bring it in here to me. Got that straight?

(*Tim glances at Miss Herrick. She nods.*)

TIM

Yes'm.

MRS. DIXON

If you do it just the way I've told you to, I'll give you five dollars.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

TIM

Say, I'd do it for nothin'.

(Quickly, lest this noble attitude should be misinterpreted.)

But I kin use the money.

(Exit Tim.)

MRS. DIXON

(Contentedly.)

Now Joe Dixon and Mrs. Gordon can come back just as soon as they want to. There'll be something doing.

MISS HERRICK

(Laughing.)

There certainly will. I'm afraid you and I have mislaid our moral sense.

MRS. DIXON

(Crossing behind her and putting her hands on her shoulders.)

Don't think I don't see that. It's lying, and it's double-dealing, and I'm dragging you into it, too. But how else can I save Joel?

MISS HERRICK

Are you sure the statement is strong enough to convince Senator Dixon when he reads it?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(Turning to look at her.)

Mercy! It ain't the statement that's goin' to convince Joe. It's Mrs. Herbert Gordon.

MISS HERRICK

What do you mean?

MRS. DIXON

I want her to do it for me—if I can make her. The only way to get at Joe Dixon now is through Mrs. Gordon. He won't believe me.

(Very significantly.)

When the proofs come *watch her*.

MISS HERRICK

You're extremely clever, Mrs. Dixon.

MRS. DIXON

(Modestly.)

Oh, well! You can't be up against men, women, wild animals, and cyclones all your life without learnin' somethin' about human nature.

FREDDY

(In a sharp whisper.)

I have heard all!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Joel's understudy!

FREDDY

Joel's understudy is as bad as you are. I merely want to say that if you'd like to call up Mr. Rathburn on this telephone a little later it will be safe to have a talk with him. Miss Mulholland and I are the telephone-girl.

MRS. DIXON

Call up Mr. Rathburn? Oh, I see! Make Joe *think* I'm talkin' to him. Good for the understudy! Be ready.

(*Grimly.*)

Everything goes, now I've started!

FREDDY

Farewell, fellow-conspirators!

(*In a sepulchral whisper, as he reaches the door.*)

Hist! Meet me under the ruined bridge at midnight. The password is Kirby.

(*He goes out with exaggerated caution. Senator Dixon and Mrs. Gordon enter.*)

SENATOR DIXON

Any sign of those *Planet* proofs yet?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Not yet. But they're coming!

MRS. GORDON

Pardon me if I say I doubt it. Your bluff isn't good enough.

MRS. DIXON

I'll make it good.

MRS. GORDON

You seem very confident.

(Sweetly.)

Have you your little hatchet with you to-day?

MRS. DIXON

Yes, you'll feel it soon.

SENATOR DIXON

(Puzzled.)

What are you two talkin' about?

MRS. GORDON

Hatchets. Mrs. Dixon's has grown rusty.

MRS. DIXON

If it has, you'll need treatment for lockjaw a little later.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

(Scandalized.)

Harriet, that's no way to talk!

MRS. GORDON

(With icy displeasure.)

I make every allowance for Mrs. Dixon's lack of social experience.

MRS. DIXON

(Regretfully.)

Now you're getting cross. Don't you know you can never accomplish anything till you learn to keep your temper?

MRS. GORDON

You're an apt pupil. I hope you have profited as well by other lessons I taught you. But really your hatchet is useless. I don't believe it would cut—let us say a dinner engagement.

MRS. DIXON

Wait and see.

MRS. GORDON

We're waiting—but the proofs don't come.

MRS. DIXON

I'll try to hurry them.

(She takes up the telephone.)

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THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Give me the *Planet* office, please.

(She waits.)

Is this the *Planet*? I want to speak to Mr. Rathburn.

(She waits.)

Is this Mr. Rathburn? This is Mrs. Dixon. You know I'm waitin' for those proofs.

(She listens.)

Senator Dixon is in town, and he wants to see them.

(She listens.)

Yes, but that's only a copy. He wants the newspaper proof so's to be sure the *Planet's* going to print the article. Yes. I'm glad it's on the way. It ought to be here now. Can you send me the photograph of Matthews's check?

(She listens.)

I'm sorry. I wish you could let me have it. Senator Dixon wants legal evidence. Oh, you mustn't call him that! Yes, I know. But you *mustn't*. Thank you. Good-bye.

(She hangs up the receiver.)

SENATOR DIXON

(Uneasily.)

What did Rathburn call me?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Blind as a bat, thick-skulled as a Patagonian, and stubborn as a mule.

(Regretfully.)

There was more, but I forget it.

SENATOR DIXON

(Coldly.)

You'd better. Has the *Planet* got photographs of checks that were given?

(To Mrs. Gordon.)

Looks bad, don't it?

(Mrs. Gordon shows great nervousness. Then she pulls herself together and speaks more imperiously than she has yet spoken.)

MRS. GORDON

Senator Dixon, I came here at your request. But I do not intend to wait longer for a faked-up story for which the *Planet* will pay dearly if it is published. Are you ready to escort me home? Or must I go alone?

SENATOR DIXON

Why—excuse me, Mrs. Gordon. Of course I'll go if you can't wait. But don't you want to wait? I'm interested in this.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

Better wait, Mrs. Gordon. Those proofs will interest you, too.

MRS. GORDON

Take my word for it, those proofs won't come.
(*Senator Dixon looks at her curiously.*)

TIM

(*Entering.*)

This is for you, Mrs. Dixon.

(*He hands her a bulky envelope containing galley-proofs.*)

MRS. DIXON

(*Looking at the envelope.*)

From the *Planet*. Here they are!

(*She tears it open hurriedly, glances at the head-lines, and hands the proofs to her husband.*)

MRS. GORDON

(*Breathlessly, seeing that he is unfolding them.*)

Let me read them, too. I must. I *must*!

SENATOR DIXON

Of course.

(*He reads the head-line.*)

KIRBY'S MILLION-DOLLAR STEAL!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(She moves close to his side, and reads the proofs with him. Their faces show their emotions. The Senator obviously forgets the presence of the others. Suddenly he turns and stares at Mrs. Gordon as if remembering her.)

SENATOR DIXON

By God! I believe they're rascals! It looks like they've fooled us from start to finish, Mrs. Gordon. A lot of this is new to me, but it seems clear enough.

MRS. GORDON

(Between set teeth.)

Yes, Rathburn's got everything!

(Excitedly, still reading the proofs.)

Dates, the amount of the check. H'm'm, that's bad.

(Imperiously.)

We must warn Kirby. Perhaps he can stop the publication of this. He has enormous influence.

SENATOR DIXON

(Turning to stare at her.)

Mrs. Gordon! What do you mean? You don't understand, and I don't wonder. Those fellows seem to be a pack of thieves! They've hanged them-

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

selves, and were trying to hang us. Look at this! And this! And this!

(He shows her the proofs, pointing to certain passages.)

MRS. GORDON

(Losing her head.)

They've acted like fools, leaving such tracks uncovered. Oh, I told Kirby that Jackson was a wretched little sneak. Why didn't he listen to me? But we've got to warn him. Don't you see?

(Mrs. Dixon draws close to Miss Herrick, and nods toward Mrs. Gordon as if to say "You see?" The two women never remove their eyes from Mrs. Gordon until the moment of the Senator's arraignment.)

SENATOR DIXON

(Drawing off and staring at Mrs. Gordon in consternation.)

No, I don't see. What are you saying? It's too much for me. I can't take it in.

MRS. GORDON

Get Kirby on the wire again, quick! He will know what to do.

SENATOR DIXON

But you—you—you—what have you to do with this?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

Oh, do something! *Do something!* Can't you see the position we are in?

SENATOR DIXON

(Slowly.)

Yes. I'm beginning to. Belden couldn't show me. The *Planet* couldn't show me. No one but you could show me. But you're doing it now.

MRS. GORDON

(Pulling herself together.)

Why, Senator—

SENATOR DIXON

So you knew Jackson was a little sneak, did you?
So you warned Kirby!

(Explosively.)

Then you've known what they were all along!
You've been working with them! They're your friends! You want to save them! Well, they're no friends of mine. And you—

(He stands silent an instant, thinking hard. Slowly his expression changes to one of entire comprehension. His voice rises as he turns upon her.)

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THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

You're what Belden said you were. I couldn't believe it. You've been leadin' me around by the nose for months, making me your tool, and tryin' to make me the tool of those friends of yours. Using me! Selling me out! Ready to ruin me for a few thousand dollars! That's a knock-out blow for any man. *(She shrinks back. Silently Miss Herrick withdraws.*

Mrs. Dixon sits down at the desk and looks at them thoughtfully.)

MRS. GORDON

Calm yourself, Senator. We're both excited, but we're too good friends to—
(He interrupts her.)

SENATOR DIXON

Friends! I guess not. Never again! Those other fellows are your friends. They're the ones you've been helping.

(He laughs savagely.)

I've had my lesson. Most any one can fool me once, I guess, but the same person can't fool me twice. You've killed my friendship.

(His voice changes.)

You've killed other things, too—my faith in you. I thought you was on a pinnacle above the rest of the

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

world. I thought you was the kind of woman poets write about. You meant everything to me, *and you sold me out.* It's over. I'm through.

(He goes to the door, opens it, and waits for her to pass.)

MRS. GORDON

(Pausing at the door.)

When you think this over coolly you may see things differently, Senator. Then perhaps you will listen to me.

(Senator Dixon turns from her with evident repugnance. She winces, then turns to Mrs. Dixon, who rises and comes toward her.)

MRS. GORDON

Good-bye, Mrs. Dixon. I hardly hope for the pleasure of another meeting.

MRS. DIXON

(Quietly.)

No, I'm going to bury that little hatchet—unless you want it as a souvenir.

(Exit Mrs. Gordon.)

SENATOR DIXON

(Slowly approaching his wife.)

If I could be surprised at anything now, I'd be

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THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

surprised at you! How you have changed! You look like the girl I married!

(Mrs. Dixon looks at her husband with the scorn she feels.)

MRS. DIXON

How do you think you look to me?

SENATOR DIXON

(Hanging his head.)

Like a fool! You can't be harder on me than I am on myself. There was a good deal coming to me, and I got it. I'm sorry I couldn't take it alone. I made you suffer, too. I want to make it up to you.

MRS. DIXON

Do you know why you want to, Joel? I'll tell you.
(She approaches him and looks him straight in the eye.)

First of all, because you've been thrown down and tramped on, an' you want to run to me for comfort, like you've always done. Next, you want it because I look younger and prettier; because I've got on a French hat and some new clothes; because my hair is fashionable and my complexion is better than it was. That's why!

(Slowly.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

You can get all that somewhere else. Under these new clothes I'm the same woman you got tired of, and neglected.

SENATOR DIXON

(With sudden heat.)

You're *not* the same woman you were, and it's not clothes and hair that's changed you. For twenty years you stood still, Harriet. Now you've begun to move. That's where the change is. Why didn't you do it sooner? You and me started together. I worked all day and studied half the night. I grubbed and sweated and climbed. What did you do? You peeled potatoes. That was right. We needed them. You stood by and did your share. But then I got ahead. I made money. I hired servants for you. I gave you a fine house and opportunities. Did you take them? No. *You kept right on peeling potatoes.* We didn't need them then; we needed something else. That's the time you didn't stand by; you didn't do your share. Then I met another kind of woman. It was a new experience to me. It swept me off my feet, as it's swept many a man before me.

(He stops and adds in a different tone.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Isn't there something to be said for me? Ain't we both to blame? Let's start over and do better.

MRS. DIXON

We can't wipe out this last half hour.

SENATOR DIXON

(Slowly.)

It ain't just this last half hour that's changed you. It's the last two months. What started you off in the first place—leavin' home and comin' to New York and dressin' yourself up like this when you never did it for me in the old days?

MRS. DIXON

Don't you know why I did it? Don't you know who I did it for?

SENATOR DIXON

Is there some one else? Some one you've met here? By God, I believe there is! Who is it?

(With sudden conviction.)

It's Belden—that's who it is! I was a fool not to see it.

MRS. DIXON

(Furiously.)

Now at last you've finished your work! You've done it up brown! It wasn't enough to break my heart.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

It wasn't enough to drag me through the dust before that woman and my friends! It wasn't enough to make me a coward that trembled for fear of losin' you, and a liar that lied to save you! No! You've got to insult me, too!

SENATOR DIXON

Harriet!

MRS. DIXON

Get out of this room! Get out of my life!
(*Her voice breaks.*)

SENATOR DIXON

Harriet! You don't mean that! Why, you're crying!
(*He tries to take her hands.*)

MRS. DIXON

(*Pushing him away and speaking with intense conviction.*)

Don't touch me! Don't come near me! And don't fool yourself! I ain't cryin' for you, Joel Dixon. I'm cryin' for the man I thought you were.

SENATOR DIXON

(*Suspiciously.*)

What are you going to do?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

I'm goin' to lead my own life. It took me a long time to start—you're right about that. But I'm off now and I'll never stop. I'm through with you, I tell you. I'm through with your potatoes and your politics and you. Now go.

(She motions toward the door. With a quick movement Dixon seizes his hat, turns on his heel, and goes out as

THE CURTAIN FALLS

ACT IV

ACT IV

TIME:—*An evening in October.*

SCENE:—*Mrs. Dixon's apartment on Gramercy Park, New York. The rise of the curtain shows a charming living-room, with good pictures, and with many well-filled book-shelves against the walls. A great window at the rear looks out on the park. Through it is seen the tower of the Metropolitan Building, with its illuminated clock. A grand piano stands in the right [upper] corner. Logs burn in the fireplace [left]. Before it is a large davenport, on which Freddy and Virginia are sitting. At the end of the davenport is a table containing books, magazines, and a reading-lamp. At the other end [down] is an easy-chair. At the right [down] sit Mrs. Dean and Colonel Belden, deep in a game of cards. As the curtain rises Miss Herrick is at the piano, playing a dreamy waltz. All are in evening dress. Annie, Mrs. Dixon's maid, is removing the coffee cups. Miss Herrick stops playing, rises, and comes forward.*

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

This is what comes of being neighborly in New York!
Who but Mrs. Dixon would dream of such a thing?

MISS JEFFERSON

(Languidly.)

Why this cryptic utterance, Ruth?

MISS HERRICK

I'm not cryptic. I'm grumbling. Here's our hostess
torn from the dinner-table to comfort a sick neighbor
across the hall, and here are we left lamenting.

FREDDY

I'm not lamenting. Virginia, if you will turn one
inch more toward me I will look deep into your eyes,
the way they do in books.

(To Miss Herrick.)

Run away, Ruth. We're busy.

MISS HERRICK

Of course! You four are utterly absorbed in each
other. But what about me?

MRS. DEAN

You chose your lonely spinster path. Now look
at us and gnash your teeth.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(She plays the last card in her hand and draws in the trick. To Colonel Belden.)

Game!

COLONEL BELDEN

Yes, Ruth, study the two happy couples before you and learn too late what life really means.

MISS HERRICK

It seems to mean a selfish absorption in each other, since your engagement, and a complete indifference to everybody else.

(Enter Annie, Mrs. Dixon's maid. She has a card on a tray, which she offers to Miss Herrick.)

MISS HERRICK

(Taking the card.)

For me, Annie?

ANNIE

Yes'm. The lady asked if you were here. When I said you were she sent in the card.

MISS HERRICK

(Reading the card aloud.)

Mrs. James Montmorency Mulligan! I never even heard of the woman.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

ANNIE

She said, miss, if you didn't remember her I was to say her name was Mulholland before she got married.

MISS HERRICK

Of course! Clarice! I had forgotten!

(To Colonel Belden.)

She married a Far Western millionaire a month ago, and has been away on her honeymoon. But what can she want with me?

(To Annie.)

I will see her.

(Exit Annie.)

FREDDY

(Excitedly, rising.)

Clarice in all her new war-paint. By Jove, what fun! I'm glad I'm here!

(Enter Miss Mulholland, now Mrs. Mulligan. She is dressed in the extreme of Paris fashion. She wears an exquisite wrap, which she throws back, revealing herself in full evening dress, cut very décolleté. On her head is a jeweled tiara, and on her throat a diamond necklace. She also wears numerous long, jeweled chains and carries a lorgnette. Diamond bracelets sparkle on her arms. She approaches Miss Herrick with languid ease, moving

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

slowly, that the full effect of her appearance may burst upon observers.)

MRS. MULLIGAN

(With great elegance.)

Good-evenin', Miss Herrick!

(In her natural tones, as they shake hands.)

Say, I'm awful glad to see you. Excuse me for buttin' in like this. But I got somethin' special to tell you.

MISS HERRICK

(Cordially.)

I'm very glad to see you, Mrs. Mulligan. I think you know Mrs. Dean, Miss Jefferson, Colonel Belden—

MRS. MULLIGAN

(Bowing elegantly.)

Well, I guess yes. Colonel Belden give me a dinner once. And, oh, the way he done it!

COLONEL BELDEN

(Laughing, but embarrassed.)

I remember that, very pleasantly.

MRS. DEAN

(To Colonel Belden.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

A hiatus in those lonely evenings I heard so much about!

FREDDY

Was that *you*, dad?

(*To Virginia.*)

"He never said one word!" How d' ye 'do, Miss Mulholland?—Mrs. Mulligan, I mean!

(*He approaches her with outstretched hand. Mrs. Mulligan raises her lorgnette and surveys him severely through it.*)

MRS. MULLIGAN

(*To Miss Herrick.*)

Some gentleman friend of yours, I infer.

FREDDY

(*Stunned.*)

Why, Clarice!

MISS HERRICK

(*Amused.*)

Mrs. Mulligan, my cousin, Mr. Belden.

(*Mrs. Mulligan bows with great hauteur. Freddy bows very formally, retreats to the davenport, sits down, and buries his face in a sofa-cushion.*)

MRS. MULLIGAN

(*To Miss Herrick.*)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Say, it was hard luck to get Mulligan for a name, wasn't it? It was the only cheap present Jim ever give me, but it looks fine on checks. Jim's my husband—James Montmorency. Like that part of it?

MISS HERRICK

Very much.

MRS. MULLIGAN

His name's really James Michael Mulligan, but I couldn't stand for that. I told him he had to break away from all he could of it, and buy some visitin'-cards.

MISS JEFFERSON

You seem very happy, Mrs. Mulligan.

MRS. MULLIGAN

Why wouldn't I be? Did you ever see so many good clothes on one person at one time?

COLONEL BELDEN

You positively dazzle us!

MRS. MULLIGAN

(Pleased.)

It's the diamonds does that. This is only one of the

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

movin'-picture shows I'm givin' at the Waldorf these nights. We're stoppin' there this week.

FREDDY

(To Virginia.)

That explains the crowds on Thirty-fourth Street.

MRS. MULLIGAN

(Ignoring him.)

Jim trims me up like I was a Christmas tree. He'd hang pearls on me like strings of popcorn, but I won't let him. Taste is my motto, I tell him—taste *an'* moderation. Like my dress, Freddy?

(She approaches him, smiling.)

FREDDY

(Reviving, jumping up and going to her.)

It's simply great. But why did you cut me dead?

MRS. MULLIGAN

I was just gettin' a rise out of you!

(She turns to the others.)

Say, I'm in luck. I didn't expect to find you all here.

Now I can say good-bye to every one.

(Elegantly.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

We're sailing for Europe to-morrow on the *Olympic*.
We got four rooms—*an'* two baths!

MISS HERRICK

For Europe! That's very nice.

MRS. MULLIGAN

Ain't it? There was a girl at our hotel table in Atlantic City. She was just back from Rome. All she talked about was the cattycombs there. I was wild.

FREDDY

Why?

MRS. MULLIGAN

I knew she meant the shell combs. But I couldn't find none here and I didn't want to ask no questions. Finally Jim says, "Come to Rome, Clarice, and I'll buy ye every cattycomb they got." So we're goin'. That's Jim.

MISS JEFFERSON

Marriage isn't a failure, is it?

MRS. MULLIGAN

You bet it ain't. The beauty business was. So was

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

literachoor. God knows, I thought men was failures, too; but Jim's different, somehow.

FREDDY

Like me.

MRS. MULLIGAN

Not so you'd notice, it, Freddy! My husband's made his pile, an' all we got to do is spend it. But I'd married him if he hadn't a cent. The minute he turned his lamps my way all the other lights went out for me.

MISS HERRICK

I think you said there was something you wanted to tell me. Shall we go into another room?

MRS. MULLIGAN

No, I'll get it off my lungs right here. I feel pretty bad about it. I guess I helped to mix things up.

MISS HERRICK

What things?

MRS. MULLIGAN

I'll tell you, and you can do the rest. I ran against Senator Dixon in Central Park this afternoon.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

Senator Dixon? I thought he was in Oklahoma?

MRS. MULLIGAN

He got here yesterday.

COLONEL BELDEN

Of course, he wants to be in Washington when Congress convenes, next week.

MISS JEFFERSON

I didn't think you knew Senator Dixon.

MRS. MULLIGAN

I met him the day he come to the office in June to talk to Mrs. Dixon. He hit my office when he was leavin'. I'd heard some of the talk. He said he was in—well, in sheol—so I tried to show him the elevator.

MISS HERRICK

But what happened to-day?

MRS. MULLIGAN

He was walkin' in the park, and Jim and me was in our new motor. We ast him to get in. He didn't want to. I never seen a man so dee-pressed.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

That doesn't seem like the Senator.

MRS. MULLIGAN

He looked like he was in the cemetery, on his way to little Robbie's grave. We made him come, and then he was interested in our car. It has six cylinders, or sixteen, I forget which—perhaps it's sixty. Oh no, it's sixty horses.

FREDDY

That's awfully interesting. What else has it got?

MRS. MULLIGAN

(Proudly.)

It's got tires that don't have to be galvanized.

MISS HERRICK

(Interrupting, with an apologetic smile.)

But the Senator—what about him? How did you mix things?

MRS. MULLIGAN

(Recalled.)

Oh yes. Well, we talked about you and Mrs. Dixon and Mrs. Dean, and he ast me was it true Colonel Belden was goin' to be married. I said yes, I heard

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Miss Herrick say so, but it wasn't out yet. Then he ast did *she* seem happy, meanin' Mrs. Dean, I thought.

MISS HERRICK

Of course he meant Mrs. Dean. But that was odd—

MRS. MULLIGAN

No, he didn't. I said I'd never seen a woman so tickled except when I turned to me lookin'-glass. An' he got blue as trust milk, an' said he was delighted to hear it. Then he made us stop the car and let him out. You could hear the dead-march playin' as he stood on the road, holdin' his hat in his hand.

COLONEL BELDEN

What *are* you getting at?

MRS. MULLIGAN

I'm tellin' you. "Good-bye, Mrs. Mulligan," he says, just like that. "When you see my wife tell her I wish her happiness in her new life." The next minute he was gone among the trees, and I saw that all the time I'd been talkin' about Mrs. Dean *he* thought I was talkin' about Mrs. Dixon.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

(To Colonel Belden.)

He thinks his wife is going to get a divorce from him and marry you! He has heard some gossip.

FREDDY

That's because you're here so much, dad.

COLONEL BELDEN

Fred, hold your tongue.

MISS JEFFERSON

Why didn't you go after him, Mrs. Mulligan, and straighten things out?

MRS. MULLIGAN

We tried, but he was gone. Then Jim tried to find him at some of the hotels, but 'twas like lookin' for a dollar in a contribution box.

(To Miss Herrick.)

So I went to your apartment, an' when I found you was here I come after you. I felt awful, on Mrs. Dixon's account. I done her up so grand at the beauty parlors—an' now it looks like my art's wasted.

MISS HERRICK

I don't know what we can do.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. MULLIGAN

You fix it some way. I got to go now. Jim's waitin' down-stairs. I wanted him to come up, but he says no. "I ain't in sussiety yet," he says, "an' there's no use pretendin' I am." So he went in the hotel caffy to have a drink with our new shover.

MISS HERRICK

Thank you, Mrs. Mulligan. It was very good of you to come and tell me this.

MRS. MULLIGAN

(Bowing all round.)

Good-bye, then. Bon voyage! Oh, do I say that or do you folks say it?

COLONEL BELDEN

We say it.

ALL TOGETHER

Bon voyage!

(Mrs. Mulligan bows and smiles.)

FREDDY

I will take you to your car, Mrs. Mulligan, if you will allow me that precious privilege.

(Exit Freddy and Mrs. Mulligan.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DEAN

(Slowly.)

If there was any chance of a reconciliation between those two, I suppose this silly rumor has spoiled it.

MISS JEFFERSON

It serves Senator Dixon right. It may put him through something of what Mrs. Dixon suffered last spring.

COLONEL BELDEN

(Laughing.)

Incidentally, he may put something through me. Those Western chaps are always provided with six-shooters.

(Freddy enters.)

FREDDY

Clarice sends us a postscript. In her excitement she forgot to mention one trivial detail.

(Impressively.)

Senator Dixon got Mrs. Dixon's address from her.

COLONEL BELDEN

(To Mrs. Dean.)

My dear, you will announce our engagement tomorrow if you wish to marry a man who is unpunctured.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

FREDDY

Too late, dad. He's coming here *to-night!*

MRS. DEAN

(*Decidedly.*)

I'll go and get Harriet.

(*She rises.*)

COLONEL BELDEN

(*Rising also.*)

Right you are, Isabel. In the mean time I'll seek some safe, sequestered nook until this little matter is cleared up in Dixon's mind.

MISS HERRICK

Don't be in such a hurry to unravel that tangle. It may help matters. I'll see Senator Dixon when he comes, and sound him. Then if you two will play up a bit—

COLONEL BELDEN

Not in a thousand years! You explain things to Dixon, Ruth, and you do it fully. Understand?

MISS HERRICK

I shall use my own judgment. I'm not sure Mrs. Dixon will ever forgive her husband—but I do know she has been desperately unhappy since she sent him away.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(Exit Colonel Belden and Mrs. Dean. As they leave Mrs. Dixon enters by the other door. She is in full evening dress.)

MISS HERRICK

Harriet, Senator Dixon is in town. He's coming here this evening.

MRS. DIXON

Joel? In town? Coming here? Why?

MISS HERRICK

He will explain that. Will you see him?

MRS. DIXON

M—m— Yes.

(She reflects for an instant.)

I'll see him. I want to know what he's done for himself—or whether he has done anything.

MISS HERRICK

You take his coming calmly.

MRS. DIXON

Mrs. Dean has taught me that.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

And much more. Senator Dixon will be surprised at what you've done for yourself.

MRS. DIXON

Do you think he will?

(Thoughtfully.)

I can talk on almost any subject for one minute. If it isn't changed then, I'm done for.

MISS HERRICK

Your One-Minute Talks on Timely Topics are very useful.

MRS. DIXON

Those minute talks help out a lot at dinners. Men like them. They can go right on eating while I converse.

MISS HERRICK

(Seriously.)

Harriet, aren't you a little sorry for Senator Dixon?

MRS. DIXON

I'll tell you after I've seen him! If he's what he was last June, I'll be mighty sorry for him.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

You haven't heard a word from him since?

MRS. DIXON

No. He had to sink or learn to swim. I couldn't help him. A time comes to every one of us when we have to work out things alone. Joe's time, and mine, came this summer.

(A bell rings. Annie enters with a card, which she hands to her mistress. Mrs. Dixon glances at it.)

MRS. DIXON

Show him in.

(To Miss Herrick.)

It's Joe. You see him first. I'll come in later.

(She goes out swiftly. Senator Dixon enters.)

SENATOR DIXON

Good-evening, Miss Herrick. I didn't hope to find you here. Good-evening.

(He bows to Freddy and Virginia and shakes hands with Miss Herrick. Freddy and Virginia, after acknowledging his greeting, continue their tête-à-tête.)

MISS HERRICK

Mrs. Dixon will see you in a few minutes, Senator. Mrs. Mulligan told us you were coming.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

I'm only in town for a day on my way to Washington. From what I hear my wife will want to have a talk, and straighten out some business matters. I can't leave her entirely to those lawyer fellows.

MISS HERRICK

I see.

SENATOR DIXON

I ain't going to stand in her way. I came to tell her so. Will Belden be here to-night?

MISS HERRICK

He is here now.

SENATOR DIXON

(Quickly.)

I s'pose they're beginning to plan for the wedding?

MISS HERRICK

(Smiling.)

Colonel Belden's? Yes, they're planning for it. But you know it's not out yet.

SENATOR DIXON

(Stiffly.)

Naturally it wouldn't be, till after the divorce. Even

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

New York's got to draw the line somewhere. But I've heard it whispered about considerably.

MISS HERRICK

You have? Really?

SENATOR DIXON

Where's my wife going to live, Miss Herrick? Everybody but me seems to know her plans.

MISS HERRICK

Mrs. Dixon thinks she will live abroad every summer, and in New York in the winter. She has made a host of friends here. She has entered a new world.

SENATOR DIXON

What kind of a world? How does a man get there?

MISS HERRICK

It's a very beautiful world, Senator. One entrance is through the pages of books.

SENATOR DIXON

Humph! My wife got through all right, did she? What does she do there?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

She studies, hears music, looks at pictures.

SENATOR DIXON

They say fellows who study the stars know how far they are from earth. How near's the nearest star?

MISS HERRICK

(Smiling.)

The planet Venus is only about twenty-six million miles away.

SENATOR DIXON

Is that all? Well, Miss Herrick, that's just about as near as I feel to my wife's new world.

FREDDY

(To Virginia.)

Every star is an eye, Virginia, looking admiringly at you. Thus every I is a U to me.

MISS JEFFERSON

An I O U, I'm afraid, Freddy, judging by what I've heard of your extravagance.

SENATOR DIXON

(Nodding toward him.)

Belden's son, ain't it? What brings him here?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MISS HERRICK

He says he has to come to get a glimpse of his father.

SENATOR DIXON

Confound his father! Oh, excuse me!

MISS HERRICK

Freddy is fond of Mrs. Dixon, too. And he likes Mrs. Dean and Miss Jefferson. They both live with Mrs. Dixon, you know. We all feel very much at home here.

SENATOR DIXON

Did you persuade her to see me to-night?

MISS HERRICK

She wasn't hard to persuade. She knew you came on business.

SENATOR DIXON

How strange it seems! Her friends all welcome, and me only able to get in under your umbrella.

MISS HERRICK

I'm glad to hold it over you.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

I s'pose my wife wouldn't take me in out of a cyclone.
Does she—does she ever speak about me?

MISS HERRICK

She spoke of you to-night, for the first time—when she
heard you were coming.

SENATOR DIXON

I guess I ain't been in her mind very much.
*(He rambles round the room, stops at the book-shelves,
picks up a volume and looks at it helplessly.)*

SENATOR DIXON

(Reading the title.)
The Symbolist Movement in Literature. What's that
mean? Does she know?

MISS HERRICK

(Laughing.)
She will before she gets through. Colonel Belden is
reading it aloud now to her and Mrs. Dean.
*(The Senator opens the book and dazedly regards its
contents.)*

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

Reading it aloud, eh? They've marked this passage.
(*He reads.*)

"A symbol might be defined as a representation which does not aim at being a reproduction." Great Scott! What does that mean? I don't know. Do they?

MISS HERRICK

Yes. Mrs. Dixon is learning very fast.
(*Senator Dixon closes the book with a sudden air of decision and puts it into his pocket.*)

SENATOR DIXON

I'm goin' to borrow this book. I'd like to see if it means anything.
(*He holds out his hand.*)

You been a mighty good friend to my wife. You ain't played my game, but I can't blame you for that.

MISS HERRICK

(*Putting her hand into his.*)
Thank you, Senator.

FREDDY

(*Exultantly, rising and coming toward them.*)
Shake hands with me, too. Miss Jefferson has just

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

made me the happiest man in the world. She's going to marry me.

MISS HERRICK

(*Putting her arm around Virginia.*)

That's capital, but it isn't news.

FREDDY

What d'ye mean?

MISS HERRICK

(*Kindly.*)

Virginia and I knew it long before you did.

FREDDY

You did? W—When did you decide?

MISS JEFFERSON

The first time I met you!

FREDDY

Just like that!

(*To Dixon.*)

She plucked me off the tree of life as if I'd been—

MISS JEFFERSON

A green apple! Exactly.

FREDDY

Unmaidenly, I call it. What's the world coming to?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

(Shaking hands with him and Virginia.)

It's coming to women, young man. The sooner you know that, the better.

FREDDY

Coming? It's *come*.

(To Virginia.)

Well, let's go and tell father—unless you've told him already! Good-bye, Senator.

(To Virginia.)

You're sure you want me? I've led a frightful life!

MISS JEFFERSON

Don't take it so hard, Freddy. I'll be kind to you.

FREDDY

(With gloomy resignation.)

All right. Lead me to the altar.

(He follows her out of the room. Senator Dixon looks after them. Mrs. Dixon opens the door softly, looks in, sees him, and hesitates. Then she comes forward and greets him calmly.)

MRS. DIXON

(Offering Dixon her hand.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

How do you do, Joel? I'm sorry I kept you waiting.
(*The Senator takes her hand, stares at her dazedly, tries to speak, and fails. He forgets to release her hand, which she quietly disengages.*)

MISS HERRICK

Good-night, Harriet. Good-night, Senator. As I'm under the grinding heel of a corporation I must keep early hours.
(*Exit Miss Herrick.*)

SENATOR DIXON

(*Awkwardly.*)

I thought we ought to have a talk on—on business.

(*He stops and stares at her. It is plain that the great change in her appearance dazzles and bewilders him.*)

MRS. DIXON

Won't you sit down?

(*Mrs. Dixon indicates the divan, and he seats himself. She takes a small chair and sits down also, facing him.*)

SENATOR DIXON

(*Looking around.*)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

It's mighty cosy here. I been livin' in hotels so much I've most forgot the feel of a home.

(Confusedly.)

This seems like old times, don't it; both of us together?

MRS. DIXON

(Calmly.)

You came to talk to me. What did you want to say?

(Senator Dixon stares at her, and is again confused by this strange presence, so like, yet so unlike, his wife.)

SENATOR DIXON

I—yes, I—

(Desperately.)

Great Scott, Harriet! Give a man a chance to pull himself together. It ain't an easy errand I've come on.

(Confusedly.)

I—I picked up one of your books a few minutes ago.

(He takes the volume from his pocket and offers it to her.)

MRS. DIXON

(Raising her eyebrows in polite surprise as she takes it.)

I didn't think you cared much about books.

SENATOR DIXON

(More at his ease on this neutral topic.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

I ain't had much time for books so far. But I think every man ought to read *some*.

MRS. DIXON

(With great formality.)

How did this book impress you?

SENATOR DIXON

(Dazed.)

Hey? Why—why—

(Rallying gallantly.)

The author seems to have some new ideas. Near as I can make out he thinks we don't really need *anything* if we can only get something that looks like it.

(Leaning forward, with growing confidence.)

Lord, Harriet! I'd hardly know you. It don't seem possible you're the same woman that left Oklahoma last spring.

(He nervously approaches the book-shelves and looks over the volumes there.)

I s'pose you've got Shakespeare here, an' Byron?

MRS. DIXON

Yes, but I don't care for either of them very much.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

I like Tennyson real well, and Longfellow, and some of Wordsworth's poetry. Don't you?

SENATOR DIXON

(*Humbly.*)

I ain't read them. I read some of Byron when I was a boy. Then I read "The Cotter's Saturday Night," and "The Lowing Herd Winds Slowly O'er the Lea." I guess that's about all.

(*They gaze at each other for a moment across the intellectual abyss which separates them.*)

SENATOR DIXON

(*Diffidently.*)

I suppose books and music are as necessary to you now as your meals.

MRS. DIXON

Not quite. But I love them. Do you care for opera?

SENATOR DIXON

I couldn't tell an opera from the noise in a blacksmith shop.

MRS. DIXON

(*Grieved.*)

Dear me! You miss a great deal. But I believe you came to talk business.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

Yes, I came to talk about—the—the divorce.

MRS. DIXON

(Stunned, but immediately pulling herself together.)

The divorce?

SENATOR DIXON

That's the next step, ain't it?

MRS. DIXON

(Quietly.)

Yes, I suppose it is.

SENATOR DIXON

I'm goin' to make it as easy for you as I can.

MRS. DIXON

You mean you're going to get it? On the ground of desertion?

SENATOR DIXON

Good Lord, no! You get it—on any ground you please. It's all goin' to be done your way.

MRS. DIXON

(Faintly.)

My way? But you want me to get it?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

Yes, of course.

MRS. DIXON

Very well, Joel. Is—is that all you came to say?

SENATOR DIXON

No. There's something more.

(He stands behind her.)

Harriet, I wish we hadn't made such a mess of things. I'll go the limit now and say all I've got to say. It ain't likely we'll meet again after this. I ain't thanked you yet for what you did for me in the Kirby deal. You saved my good name. I want you to know I realize that. And there's another thing I understand.

(Impressively.)

I ain't in your class—but that's my fault, not yours. You've made yourself over, and it's great. I haven't done it. I'm pretty raw still.

(He takes some papers from an inside pocket.)

Now tell me how you want things fixed. I'll do anything that will make you happy.

(Enter Colonel Belden and Mrs. Dean.)

COLONEL BELDEN

(Heartily.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

Why, Dixon, how do you do? I just heard you were in town.

(He offers his hand, which Dixon ignores.)

SENATOR DIXON

(Coolly.)

I got here yesterday.

(He turns away.)

COLONEL BELDEN

Why, Dixon! Surely you're not still resenting our last meeting. Didn't everything come out as we told you?

SENATOR DIXON

(Turning, and coming back to Belden.)

I know I'm under obligations to you, Belden. I'm sorry that I haven't acknowledged them before. I thank you now.

(He shakes hands with Belden.)

COLONEL BELDEN

(Courteously.)

You owe me no gratitude. That should go to Mrs. Dixon.

SENATOR DIXON

(Fiercely.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

By God, I can stand things till you come around!
Then I can't.

MRS. DIXON

Joel!

SENATOR DIXON

I—I beg your pardon. (*To Belden.*) I'd like a private talk with you if the ladies will excuse us.

COLONEL BELDEN

Is this quite the place to bring up fancied grievances?

SENATOR DIXON

Fancied grievances! By heaven! You'd think they were real enough if you were in my boots!

MRS. DIXON

Joel!

MRS. DEAN

(*In alarm.*)

Senator!

SENATOR DIXON

(*Turning to his wife.*)

I—I— Excuse me. I'm afraid I'm not acting very well. But you'll admit that the situation ain't an

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

easy one. It calls for a little more than flesh and blood can stand, I guess.

(To Belden.)

I came here to-night to do the right thing, Colonel—to do whatever my wife wants done. If you had kept away, I'd have got through it, I guess. All I can do now is to beg pardon again and get out.

COLONEL BELDEN

Here! Let me explain, Senator.

MRS. DIXON

(Grasping the situation.)

If you don't mind, Colonel, I will explain to Senator Dixon.

SENATOR DIXON

Yes, I'd rather have her say what's got to be said.

COLONEL BELDEN

(After an instant's hesitation.)

As you please.

(Annie enters with a card which she offers her mistress.)

MRS. DIXON

(Reading it aloud.)

Mrs. Herbert Gordon!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

COLONEL BELDEN

Good-night, then! Good-night, Mrs. Dixon!

MRS. DEAN

(To Colonel Belden.)

Ruth wants you to drop her at her apartment on your way home.

(Exit Colonel Belden and Mrs. Dean.)

MRS. DIXON

(Calmly.)

Has that woman followed you here, Joel? Is she in your life still?

SENATOR DIXON

(Meeting her eyes squarely.)

No. I haven't laid eyes on her since the day you saw her last June. I made a fool of myself once, but I don't work at the job all the time.

MRS. DIXON

She has audacity enough for anything, but I never dreamed she would come to my home. I'll see what she wants.

(To Annie.)

Ask her to come in.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(*Mrs. Gordon enters. Mrs. Dixon and Senator Dixon rise to receive her.*)

MRS. GORDON

Senator Dixon! You here!

SENATOR DIXON

(*Grimly.*)

This is unexpected.

MRS. GORDON

(*Recovering herself.*)

It certainly is. But I'm glad to see you, Senator.

MRS. DIXON

This reunion surprises me, too, Mrs. Gordon.

MRS. GORDON

(*Suavely.*)

I got back from Europe this morning. Now I intend to gather up the loose ends of some little matters that we dropped rather hastily last June.

MRS. DIXON

Are they still loose?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

Very. Your alleged exposure of the Kirby bill, for example, never appeared in the *Planet*.

MRS. DIXON

(*Smiling.*)

No. It never appeared.

MRS. GORDON

I want to know why. Naturally, I came to find out.

MRS. DIXON

That was natural—for you!

MRS. GORDON

The *Planet* was afraid of libel—and is still afraid. Do you realize that the bill has a good chance of passing if it comes up again?

MRS. DIXON

(*To Dixon.*)

Would you vote for it?

SENATOR DIXON

You bet I would not.

(*To Mrs. Gordon.*)

I'd fight that bill to the last ditch!

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THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

You mean that, Senator?

SENATOR DIXON

I do—and I'd enjoy the fight.

MRS. DIXON

(To Mrs. Gordon.)

The article served its purpose, you see. You threw down your cards.

MRS. GORDON

I may play that hand after all. Dare you lend me those proofs?

MRS. DIXON

Why not? With the greatest pleasure.

(Senator Dixon is looking at Mrs. Gordon closely.)

MRS. GORDON

I wish to refresh my memory.

MRS. DIXON

I have the proofs in my desk. Will you excuse me a moment?

(Mrs. Dixon leaves the room.)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

She is much changed.

SENATOR DIXON

It's astonishing what she's learned!

MRS. GORDON

Do you think so? I wonder!

SENATOR DIXON

You ought to hear her talk about books!

MRS. GORDON

I should love to. In fact, I think I *will*!
(*Mrs. Dixon re-enters, carrying two galley-proofs.*)

MRS. DIXON

Everything I know is here.

MRS. GORDON

(*Taking the proofs.*)
The proofs from the *Planet*! Thank you.

MRS. DIXON

(*Smiling.*)
They are not from the *Planet*. They never were
from the *Planet*.

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

What do you mean?

MRS. DIXON

Our late interview took place in a magazine office.
Behold the innocent type of *The Woman's Friend*!

SENATOR DIXON

(*To Mrs. Gordon, laughing.*)

She fooled us both! By George, that was smart!

MRS. GORDON

(*Controlling her annoyance.*)

Very clever, indeed. I congratulate you.

(*She rises to go, but lingers.*)

May I tell you how attractive your home is? Charming! And books everywhere! This looks interesting.

(*She picks it up.*)

The Symbolist Movement in Literature! I've never been quite sure what the symbolists were getting at. Have you, Mrs. Dixon?

SENATOR DIXON

(*Grasping his opportunity.*)

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

A symbol is a representation that does not aim at being a reproduction.

(*Mrs. Dixon pauses, stares on vacancy to recollect her "One-Minute Talk" on Symbolism, and then speaks in an expressionless tone.*)

MRS. DIXON

The symbolists maintain that mere reproduction of the thing itself is not art, but a sort of literary photography. Their method is different. Instead of *reproducing* what they *see* they *represent* what *appears* to them, as they want others to see it. Art thus becomes something more than nature. It is nature transmuted by the vision of the poet or seer.

(*She pauses. Senator Dixon looks at her, dazed.*)

MRS. GORDON

Really! Is that all?

MRS. DIXON

(*In her natural tone, but exhausted.*)

It seems a good deal to me!

MRS. GORDON

Do you understand it, Senator? It sounds very complicated. What does it really mean, Mrs. Dixon?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. DIXON

(Her face illumined by a sudden smile.)

Why, that *Planet* proof is an illustration. It was not the thing itself—only a representation of it—

(Sweetly.)

As I wanted *you* to see it! I never thought of it before, but I'm a symbolist!

SENATOR DIXON

(Exultantly.)

Now, for the first time, I really understand a symbol!

(In warm admiration.)

Harriet, how have you done it all? By Jove, it beats me what you've learned!

MRS. DIXON

Thank you, Joel.

MRS. GORDON

Here is *Hedda Gabler*, too. Your reading is varied.

(She picks up the book.)

MRS. DIXON

Are you an admirer of Ibsen?

MRS. GORDON

Not at all. To me art means beauty. I am not in-

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

terested in the clinical representation of disease. The theater is a temple, not a place for the dissection of moral gangrene.

MRS. DIXON

(Entering with great formality upon her second "Minute Talk.")

Ibsen took for his subjects the ills of the social body, but his touch was always sane and antiseptic. Even when he represented the most repulsive characters, as in the case of Hedda Gabler, the teaching of the play, truly understood, is normal and right.

MRS. GORDON

He may have felt that way about poor Hedda's disease. But Nazimova didn't agree with him.

MRS. DIXON

I beg your pardon.

MRS. GORDON

(Wearily.)

Nazimova, Nazimova.

MRS. DIXON

Nazimova! Agree with him? Of course it didn't agree with him!

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

(*To Senator Dixon.*)

Ibsen died of Nazimova!

SENATOR DIXON

I never even heard of the complaint!

(*To Mrs. Dixon.*)

And I'd never know that much about those folks if
I'd spent a lifetime at it.

MRS. DIXON

If you are satisfied, Mrs. Gordon, with this little
examination—

MRS. GORDON

Call it a pleasant chat.

(*Softly, to Senator Dixon.*)

I have been longing to see you. Are you coming my
way?

SENATOR DIXON

(*Rising.*)

No, Mrs. Gordon. Not your way. But I'll call a
cab for you.

(*To Mrs. Dixon.*)

May I come back, Harriet?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

MRS. GORDON

Thank you. I won't tear you from her side. I have a cab waiting. Good-evening.

(Exit Mrs. Gordon.)

SENATOR DIXON

And to think I ever admired that woman! Harriet, you put it all over her in book learning!

MRS. DIXON

Don't let me deceive you, Joe. I don't know much. But I'm going to study all the rest of my life.

SENATOR DIXON

You know more than I'll ever know. One thing I want to learn, though, quick. Why didn't you let Belden tell me about your—your plans?

MRS. DIXON

They're not mine. They're his. He was trying to tell you that he is to marry Mrs. Dean.

SENATOR DIXON

Harriet! And I came here to offer you a divorce!

MRS. DIXON

Why?

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

SENATOR DIXON

I had ruined your life. If there was any way of makin' you happy again I wanted to find it. But it was mighty hard to give you up! It's been a nightmare. You'll never know what I've suffered.

MRS. DIXON

That was pretty big of you, Joe—to come here like this, and offer to free me. It was like the man I thought you were.

SENATOR DIXON

Do you know why I did it? Because you've opened my eyes. I saw myself as I was—and I didn't like the picture.

(He comes closer.)

Harriet, you've brought me to my knees. You've taught me how much I've got to learn. Haven't you humbled me enough?

MRS. DIXON

I don't want to humble you.

SENATOR DIXON

Then help me. It's our whole lives we're settling. But you seem so far away I feel as if I'd have to

THE LADY FROM OKLAHOMA

halloo across the world to make you hear me. I love you! Can you hear that?

MRS. DIXON

I guess I'd hear that—anywhere.

SENATOR DIXON

Then answer it.

MRS. DIXON

Oh, my boy! I've never stopped loving you for one minute.

(She sinks into a big arm-chair near the fire. He falls on his knees before her and buries his head in her lap.)

SENATOR DIXON

(Brokenly.)

Let me take you home—to Washington!

MRS. DIXON

We'll start to-morrow. To-night—home is here.

(She takes his head between her hands and lays it against her breast.)

Why, Joe, darling, you ain't cryin'! Yes, you be! An' I'm so happy I'm forgettin' my grammar!

CURTAIN

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